

## Tranquility

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## Tranquility

by [geekyjez](#)

### Summary

When Isii and Solas are captured by Templars, the Inquisitor can do little more than watch as the Rite of Tranquility is performed on her lover. But the Rite was never intended for a god. The Templars' failure will change everything for both the Inquisitor and the man she once called Solas...

### Notes

Another AU fic. The timeline is open-ended, but I would imagine this takes place sometime after the Battle at Adamant. Also, this fic is more violent than some of the others I have posted. Pretty tame by my standards, but I figured I would put out a warning out of courtesy.

*EDIT: Because of the demand, I will definitely be writing more to this fic. I can guarantee a second chapter... and more, if I can figure out where the heck to take this strange little story I've set up for myself.*

# Chapter 1

“You don’t know what you’re doing!” Solas snarled, thrashing against the hands that held him, metal gauntlets digging into his arms. The Templars were strong— stronger than they appeared. The men had forced him to his knees, arms outstretched to either side, unable to move. He tried to pull from the Veil only to feel the sickening blast of another smite, a hot white burning pain searing through his body as his connection to the Fade weakened even further.

“Stop it!” Isii screamed, struggling against the man who held her. She clawed at his armor, spitting out threats, invoking Elgar’nan’s wrath. Her voice strained as she spoke, choking back tears that threatened to break into sobs. There was nothing she could do. They had already neutralized her magic. She was powerless and everyone there knew it.

“Hold her head up,” one of the men barked. “Make certain she sees.”

The Templar who held her took a fistful of her hair, jerking her head back. Her lips curled, teeth bared as she snarled with the ferocity of a wounded animal. Solas could see the utter defeat behind her rage. There was pain there, indescribable and deep. Pain and a low, primal fear.

He knew what they would do to her. They would make her Tranquil. They would make her passive and compliant. Then they could use the power of the anchor for their own benefit, use it however they saw fit. Use *her* however they saw fit. He had heard of the abuses that came to beautiful women who were made Tranquil - when their ability to say no was all but stripped from them.

These thoughts renewed his struggle, his legs trying to press into the ground, to push himself up, but the shems were too strong, their grip too tight. It was humiliating. Humbling. In another time, he would have had these fools trembling. He would have burned himself into their thoughts, sent them into fits of screaming, howling terror before their true punishment began. But his power now was only a fraction of what it had once been. Rising from uthenera, disconnecting himself from his long walk in the Fade – it was a slow process now that the Veil blocked his passage. His mind and his body were here, but much of his power was still trapped beyond the barrier, gradually revealing itself to him. It left him feeling half-formed and weak – much like the mortals he now surrounded himself with.

Another Templar approached, a man draped in robes rather than armor. His hands were thickly gloved to protect him from the small piece of lyrium he held, carved into the shape of the Chantry’s sun.

Solas’s mind raced. He had no concept of what would happen if they tried to cut him off from the Fade entirely. Would it even be possible? He was a part of the Fade as much as it was a part of him. Would it cut him off from all of his power or only some of it? Would it make him mortal without the Fade to sustain him? The uncertainty made his stomach lurch as the robed man held his head back.

“Stop this!” Solas demanded but they did not listen. Why would they? He was nothing but a lowly apostate. This is what Templars did to mages who would not submit.

They enslaved them.

The Templars were reciting the rite but their words mattered little when the lyrium brand was pressed to his forehead. He could hear nothing, perceive nothing but the all-consuming white flash of pain that blinded him, burning through him, forcing a ragged scream from his throat. The Veil

was ripped away with such force it left him breathless, all the air suddenly sucked from his lungs within a matter of seconds. The Fade clung to him even as it was peeled away; pulling, tearing, searching for purchase in its grip as it fought against the forced separation. He thrashed against the men who held him, but the gesture was fruitless. There was no escaping this. He could feel his mind slipping, even as he struggled to maintain his focus.

He was falling, sinking in the undertow, losing himself to the current and powerless to hold on.

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She watched helplessly as the brand was pressed to his skin, his screams sinking into her, twisting into her stomach. It was too much. It broke that last shred of her willpower. Isii sobbed, calling out for him, begging them to stop. She shut her eyes, even as the Templar tried to force her to watch, tasting bile in her throat. He would be gone. Even as he lived, even as he spoke and walked and ate and breathed, everything that made him Solas would be lost to her forever. She could not bear to look at him, to see him, this elf, this beautiful old soul, the one who opened her eyes to the wonders of the Fade, knowing that he would never walk in it again. Knowing she would never see any tenderness or love in his eyes when he looked at her. Knowing he would never again call her vhenan.

And knowing that she would be next.

She could no longer scream at them, no longer plead with them, her voice leaving her as her throat closed in tightly. She wanted to fight. She wanted to roar, to claw, to sink her teeth into flesh and rake her nails against skin until they had no choice but to kill her. Yet she knew there was nothing she could do. Even with all of her strength, they would simply hold her down. She felt heavy in the Templar's arms, succumbing to the crushing weight of their defeat. She had failed him. He followed her as their leader, as his lover. He trusted her to make the right decisions and she had failed. This was her fault. If only she had taken another route, avoided the trap. If she had made another choice, none of this would have happened.

His screaming stopped and she opened her eyes to see Solas shuddering, gasping, his eyes rolling back. He collapsed when the brand was removed, shaking as he caught his breath, the Chantry sun now burned into his flesh. She shut her eyes again. She could not bear to look at him, did not want to see. She heard the Templar finish the rite and her stomach sank. It was over. It was all over.

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It had all flowed from him like a suddenly receding tide, distant and quivering, building on the horizon, out beyond his reach, rising higher and higher until he could see nothing else, perceive nothing else.

Then, the storm wave hit.

The Veil cracked against him like a rope pulled taut and suddenly cut. The force crashed against him, pressing down into him. All of it. All at once. Everything they had tried to take from him, everything he had once possessed. He clenched his teeth, lips curled back, grimacing under the weight of it. He was overwhelmed, trembling as the energy poured into him. In an instant, the sensation was gone, the lyrium brand pulled from his skin, snapping his awareness back into his physical form.

They released his arms and he slumped forward, catching himself on his hands, panting as his

senses returned to him. His skin was thrumming with power, tingling with sensation. He lifted one hand, staring intently at his fingertips as he pressed cautiously against the Veil. The faintest whisper of frost cooled his touch. It was effortless, even more so than before the Templar's first smite. His eyes widened, his suspicion confirmed. Their attempts to rend him from the Fade had not sealed off his passage through the Veil. It had torn it open. The poor bastards had restored what had been lost to him since his entrance into uthenera.

"May Andraste guide you in your service to the Order," the robed Templar said, finishing the words of the rite. "We have freed you from your curse, mage."

Solas looked up at him, no longer able to suppress the dangerous smile that peeled back his lips.

*That you have, mortal.*

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Isii's eyes flew open as the Templar dropped her, reaching for his sword. Solas rose to his feet slowly as thick tendrils of black smoke billowed around him, curling along his limbs. With a quick flick of his wrist, the two Templars flanking him were sent flying, grunting and clattering as they skittered along the stone floor. The robed man backed away as the smoke lifted around Solas's shoulders, sank down along his neck, his eyes glowing as he grinned. He was quickly enveloped in the swirling mass as the Templars gawked in amazement. Within seconds, Solas lunged forward, breaking through the mist with the force of his body.

Only it wasn't Solas.

The robed man barely had time to scream as the wolf fell upon him, pinning him to the floor, fangs tearing ruthlessly at his throat. The beast was twice the size of any normal wolf, towering over its prey. The Templar that stood behind Isii froze, panicked, watching as his brothers-in-arms scrambled to their feet, swords drawn. The wolf lifted its head, its white fur stained red with blood. As it turned to face the soldiers, Isii's heart leapt into her throat.

The wolf trained its six icy blue eyes on the men, snarling.

*The Dread Wolf.*

Its movement was too fast, its speed barely discernible to the eye as it leapt, snarling, a blur of white and blue. The Templars were not simply mauled. They were screaming, terrified, dropping their swords to claw at their heads, pressing hard against their ears as they trembled. Their torment was brief as the wolf passed over them, silencing them each by rending their throats open.

Isii's stood, stunned, unmoving, paralyzed with shock before she was grabbed roughly from behind. The one remaining Templar pressed her back against his chest plate, his sword at her throat, using her as a shield as he backed away. She clawed at the arm that held the blade, curling her fingers around his armor, trying to pry him off of her as the wolf turned to face them. Its head lowered, a growl rolling from its chest like distant thunder. The hair on its scruff stiffened, rising as it loped slowly towards the pair.

"Get back, demon!" The man's voice shook as he shouted. The wolf stilled in its approach, narrowing its eyes. In a motion as smooth as rising from a chair, the head rose, the body shifted and Solas stood before them again, cleansed of the blood that stained the wolf seconds before. He glared at the man, his jaw clenched, his lips pulled into a hard line.

"Drop your weapon," Solas commanded. "*Now.*"

The Templar shifted his blade, forcing Isii's chin up. "I'll kill her!"

"No," Solas said calmly. "You will not." He lifted his hand, power shimmering at his fingertips. Isii could feel the energy wash past her, sinking into her captor. Even as it brushed harmlessly against her, the sheer magnitude of it made her skin crawl. The Templar began to tremble, his breaths ragged. Solas's eyes stayed on the man, assertive and commanding. "Release her."

Isii slipped out of his arms as soon as the sword lowered, rushing quickly to the side. She watched as the Templar fell to his knees in front of Solas, his face lit with terror, panting with fear. Solas stared at him, sneering before twisting his hand, his fingers delicately pulling from the Veil as a wave of ice encased the soldier, hardening instantaneously. This was not a spell to incapacitate, as she had seen him do before. It was a spell to entomb, a thick frozen shell to serve as this man's prison.

Isii backed herself against the nearby wall as Solas turned his eyes to her. His face was awash with relief that quickly soured, his brow lowering as he searched her face. "Are you alright?"

She wasn't alright. She couldn't be alright. She was confused and frightened and still clinging to an overwhelming relief that he wasn't Tranquil. She wanted to throw her arms around him and weep for joy but could not help being terrified at the notion of him touching her. She had seen the Dread Wolf. She knew what he looked like; she knew that Solas changed into his form. She wanted to say that it was some illusion, some magic that she had simply never seen from him before, but she knew. Somehow, she knew. The feel of his magic, the way he so effortlessly summoned that much power with a simple stroke of his fingers through the air...

"Fen'Harel?" She whispered, staring at him.

Solas paused, studying her expression. She could see he was thinking, mulling over his words, trying to decide how to respond. He pursed his lips, cautiously closing the distance between them. "We should not linger here, vhenan."

Her heart skipped to hear the word, even as her stomach filled with dread. She didn't know what to think. She ran a tentative finger over the Chantry's mark on his brow, both fearful and desperate to touch him. "Are you..." she paused, looking into his eyes. "Are you still you?"

Her wording was inelegant, but he understood her meaning. He grimaced, gently guiding her hand down by the wrist. "I am still me." He brushed his other hand over his forehead, healing the branded skin. "This is not the place to have this discussion. Please," he murmured, slipping her hand in his own. "Come with me."

Isii stared at him and then nodded, still dazed, unable to comprehend what she had seen.

Her lover was alive. Her lover was not Tranquil. On both these counts, she should be thrilled.

Yet she could not let go of the overwhelming sense of foreboding that weighed down on her limbs as she let the Dread Wolf take her by the hand and lead her away.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

This chapter is a bit more graphic in it's violence than the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He had been reckless. Foolish. He should have thought things through. Allowed the men to believe they had succeeded in their Rite. Taken them by surprise before they could do the same to Isii. Use magics that would be believable for the simple hedge mage Solas to achieve. He could have talked his way out of that- explained to her that some complication with the Rite had allowed the Templar's smite to wear off. He could have used his words to dance around the subject so that she would not question or doubt.

There was no explaining away the Wolf.

It was simply a form he could take, not an entity unto itself. Yet it made him feel powerful. Fearsome. He had wanted those men to tremble and quake before death took them. He wanted them to stare into his eyes before his teeth sank into their flesh. He wanted them to suffer for what they had done to her, for what they were going to do, for threatening to separate her from the Fade, for every abuse he could imagine them inflicting on her passive, passionless body. He had allowed himself to be blinded by his rage, by his desire for revenge.

*Perhaps I am not so different from Elgar'nan after all.*

The Templar encampment lay tucked against a small set of ruins, a chapel-like two-room structure barely left standing. The screams of those who tried to perform the Rite had drawn the attention of others outside – those left guarding the main body of their campsite. He could hear shouting and the clamor of shifting armor up ahead. Solas tried to evaluate the situation quickly, knowing they only had a matter of seconds before the other soldiers entered. If they stayed within the structure, they could narrow-down the field, yet it left them potentially trapped. He was in no danger, but she was still vulnerable without her magic. He could not afford to let her get pinned-down in a close-quarters fight.

He could feel her tension as he led her by the arm. There was fear there, apprehension, a desire to pull away. It pained him, but he could not think of that now. He had to get her out of there. He tightened his grip on her wrist, pulling her forward quickly, rushing the exit even as the first Templars hit the archway. He lifted a hand, propelling a barrier from his palm, a wall of force knocking the men back. He then pressed her against him, his arm slipping firmly around her waist as he faded stepped forward, feeling her cling to him fearfully as they were thrown past the entrance.

It left them in the middle of the camp. Not a good position, but better than before.

He quickly scanned the field. Three Templars at the archway, already recovering from their fallen positions. Two more advancing from the other side, stepping out from behind a circle of canvas tents. Isii watched them warily, backing away as Solas lunged forward.

He was singular in his focus. Strike to kill and do it quickly. Neutralize the threat. There was no room for mercy or half-measures. These men intended to kill them. He would offer the same in

return. First, he aimed to disable the two camp-side soldiers, brushing a wave of magic at them, letting it sink into their minds with the purest screaming terror he could muster. It would not harm them physically, but from the way their legs collapsed out from under them, their hands pressed to their heads in a fit of madness, he knew it would buy him some time.

He returned his attention to those who lay just outside the ruin walls. Two of the three fallen Templars were back on their feet, already pressing forward with their hands outstretched, attempting to neutralize his magic. Before, their smites felt like a burning pain, but now presented little more than a rippling shudder against the Veil. He threw a wide, circling barrier around them, drawing it closed with a twist of his fingers. The two Templars were trapped within it, swept up as if placed in a net pulled taut before the crushing weight forced the air from their lungs. Though the men struggled, there was little they could do as he cast a second spell, blasting them with a pulsating beam of frost, encasing them in a block of ice. The third Templar tried to rush him, staggering as Solas froze his feet into place, forming and propelling a blast of cold so powerful it solidified in mid-air, nearly breaking the man's legs as it slammed into him. His armor did little to keep his chest from being crushed.

He heard Isii's cries as he turned, his stomach clenching. "Vhenan! Get back!"

He should have known she would not stand idly by. She was wielding a dagger, clearly aiming to kill the two men who had been writhing in horror seconds earlier. But attacking men under the influence of a terror spell was a dangerous gamble. They were unpredictable, reckless, pumped so full of adrenaline that a melee approach was likely to be a deadly mistake.

Solas cast a barrier around her as she shifted, throwing herself into a new angle of attack, but it was too late. A strangled shout erupted from his throat as he saw the Templar's sword pierce skin. She let out a ragged scream as it tore through her stomach, yet did not pause her assault, throwing her arm around the man's neck. He did not have time to react to the first slash opening his throat wide before she drove the knife under his jaw. The second man lunged at her for a lethal blow but Solas caught him, throwing him back, killing him with the force of the blast as he ran over to her.

The stabbed Templar faltered on his feet, dragging her down with him as he fell. She bit back another scream, rumbling from her like a snarling growl as the weight of her body pushed the sword in deeper, struggling to disengage herself as her blood poured in a steady stream over the surface of his breastplate. Solas grabbed her from behind, pulling her up to her feet, pained to hear the sound that ripped from her chest as he freed her from the blade. Her feet could not hold her and she stumbled, his arms guiding her down as she collapsed.

"You're not him," she choked out, "tell me you're not him."

He couldn't focus on that now. With her back leaning against his chest, he pulled at her leathers, shifting her shirt up to expose her stomach, blood running between his fingers as he flooded his touch with healing magic.

"No!" she shouted, pushing his hands away, trying to roll, to crawl, even as her face showed the blinding intensity of her pain.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her back against him as she squirmed further down his lap. "Vhenan, stop."

"Don't touch me!" she shrieked, tears welling as she twisted in his arms. There was pain and grief and overwhelming fear in her eyes as they met his own.

He grappled with her hands as she struggled, catching firm on both her wrists. "Stop this!" he

barked at her. He pushed her back, pressing his palms firmly on the wound, cringing as he heard the sobbing cry she let out yet kept his hold as he poured magic into her. The cut ran deep and he tried to focus on imbuing the ragged tissue with power, stimulating the flesh to regrow and mend, to fuse and bind, to stop the heavy flow of blood. Even as he did, she dug her nails into his arms, near hysterics as she cried, her eyes closed as her body shook.

“You can’t be him. You can’t be him.” It was a panicked chant, a terrified plea of denial that tore into him as he healed her. As soon as he sealed her skin, pulling bloodied hands away, she was pressing herself forward, slamming her fist against his chest.

“You’re the Dread Wolf,” she screamed at him, striking him again. “Say it! You’re the damned Dread Wolf!”

He cringed, gripping her arms. “I am,” he said simply. There was nothing more he could say. He was Fen’Harel and now it was finished. Now she knew the truth. She stared at him wide-eyed, her body trembling.

“This entire time!” she shrieked, trying to wrench her arms away. “You. All of this. It’s been nothing but a lie!”

He tightened his grip as she struggled. “You are only going to hurt yourself, sa’lath.”

“Stop it,” she choked out, trying to hit him again, her throat tight with tears. “Stop pretending you care!”

He needed her to still, to calm, or else she would rip open the newly formed tissue. He wrapped his arm around her, pinning her to his chest. “I am not pretending,” he said as she fought against him. Her thrashing and bucking soon gave way into shaking sobs and she buried her face against his bloodied tunic. She fisted the fabric as he pulled his other arm around to embrace her, smoothing a stained hand against her back.

“Solas was never real,” she said, her voice muffled against him. “It was all a trick.”

“No, Isii.” He sank his fingers into her hair, pressing a kiss to her temple as he drew her face up to look at him, cupping her cheeks. “I have always been Solas. I bore that name well before I ever took the title of Fen’Harel. I concealed who I am, but everything else, *everything else*, has been true. My desire to offer aid, my feelings for you. There was no deception in that. I swear it.”

Her eyes were red, stinging and pained as she searched his face. “How could I ever believe that? You’re a liar. You’re Fen’Harel.” She bit his name past unwilling lips, shuddering as if saying it somehow made it more real.

“Isii - ”

“Tell me why,” she demanded. “Tell me why you’re doing this.”

He studied her a moment. “Corypheus is just as much a threat to me as he is to you. The Breach puts everyone in peril, including those I aim to protect. Would you expect me to sit idly by and watch the destruction of everything that remains of this world?”

“For the god who laughed maniacally at the fall of Arlathan? Yes.”

His expression hardened. “Those are nothing but fairy tales. Fabrications. The Dalish know nothing of Arlathan. Or of me.”



“Is that why you hate us so much? Because we’re not afraid to call you what you really are? A *selfish, self-serving, lying, arrogant bastard*?” He stared at her silently as she ripped his hands away from her face, her eyes narrowing. “You can think you’re being selfless, you can declare yourself a martyr for all I care. *You used me*. I don’t know why. I don’t know what you hope to gain. But you used me. You lied to me, let me believe you loved me, let me believe I had a future with you, that I could trust you-”

“Vhenan, please-”

“Don’t call me that,” she spat. “I don’t even know you!”

“Isii, listen to me,” he began desperately. “You know me better than anyone. My values, my spirit. *You know me*.” She was shaking her head and he brought his hand up to touch her cheek again.

“Please, I know this is a lot to take-”

“No. No, you really don’t,” she said, glaring. “I just found out my lover *doesn’t exist*. That he’s a figment of the imagination of a damned trickster god. That I fell in love with an illusion crafted by the Great Betrayer himself,” she bit back at him, swatting his hand away. “That’s a little bit more serious than simply *a lot to take*.”

“I never meant for this to happen.” He stared down at her pityingly. “I did not expect to fall in love with you.”

“Don’t you dare mock me,” she snarled.

“I am not-”

“No,” she said, scrambling backward, weakly pushing herself to her feet. “I’m not listening to this.”

She staggered as she tried to walk away from him, unsteady in her steps, swaying through the labored movements. He rose behind her, grabbing her arm to prop her up. “You have lost a lot of blood...”

“Don’t,” she snapped, jerking her arm away. “Just leave me alone.”

“You know I cannot do that.”

“You can do whatever you want, Fen’Harel,” she shouted, pressing forward again, trying to walk away from him. “You’re a damned god! Part of a blighted pantheon that you told me didn’t even exist!”

“I didn’t lie about that,” he said, following closely. “I am not a god. Neither were the others.”

“Fine,” she barked, panting from the strain. “Whatever you are. I don’t care. Just get away from me.”

He would not leave her like this, injured and staggering through the woods. He followed, even as she screamed at him to go. When she lunged at him, when she gripped his vest and threw his back against a nearby tree, he could feel just how weak she was. Her breaths were labored and her hold on him was one of the only things keeping her on her feet. The threats she snarled were half-hearted and pointless. He would not leave her. There was an Inquisition camp nearby, but he knew the walk was too far for her now. Even if she stayed on her feet, she would not make it there before dark at the pace she set. When he stooped down, sweeping her legs out from under her with his arm, lifting her up to carry her, she resisted. She writhed, pressing against him, demanding he put her down. Still, he did not, wordlessly pressing forward. She eventually surrendered to his hold, too

tired to keep trying. He could hear her shaking breaths as her head rested against his shoulder, a mixture of grief and pain and exhaustion.

“I hate you,” she whispered. His jaw clenched, his throat tightening, but he said nothing.

He knew he deserved this.

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She didn't know what to think or what to feel. She was tired. So tired. First she had grieved the loss of her vhenan, knowing he would be made Tranquil. Then, the overwhelming fear and shock of learning the truth, of seeing him for what he truly was – and she had to mourn the loss of him all over again.

Solas wasn't real. He never had been. He never would be.

It had all been a lie.

The man who carried her now was a stranger. The god from her childhood nightmares. A trickster and a liar and someone who had convinced her that she'd found someone she could spend her life with. The first time she'd ever known anyone who could make her believe that it was worth risking pain in order to allow herself to open up, to trust.

She should have known better.

She felt cold, weak, shivering against him and she hated herself for it. She didn't want to feel vulnerable – not now and not in front of him. But he'd made it clear, in his wordless stoicism, that he was not going to let her go. She tried to think things through, to make a plan. If she tried to have him arrested, taken into Inquisition custody, it could end in a bloodbath. She'd seen what he was capable of and she would not lose good men to the Dread Wolf. She could insist that he needed to leave, but could not force him if he was unwilling. How could anyone force a god to do anything but their own will?

She felt a hollow pit in her stomach. He was a god. She couldn't even conceive of what that meant. Had he been this way this entire time? Was he truly immortal or could he die? Were the fables she knew of him true or were they merely morality tales – or a mixture of both? The Dread Wolf she knew was nothing like Solas – but again, Solas had never been real.

Fen'Harel did not speak again until they reached their encampment. She could hear alarm in the voices of the soldiers who greeted them – unsurprising, given that they were both heavily stained with her blood. His words were few, demanding food and drink be fetched for her immediately, along with a basin of water. He did not slow his stride, only lowering her to the ground when they were both inside her tent. Two soldiers with the requested items poked their heads in a moment later, making their deliveries before turning to leave. The Dread Wolf reached for the simple wooden slat that served as a tray for her meal, dragging it closer before she snatched it from his grasp. “I will not have you feeding me,” she snapped at him. He said nothing, studying her silently for a moment before rising.

“Clean yourself up once you have eaten,” he said coldly. “I will return when you are done.” He pressed himself past the tent flaps, disappearing into the camp.

The instant she was alone, the tears returned. She buried her face in her hands, snarling at herself and her own weakness and stupidity. She didn't want to shed tears over the Bringer of Nightmares. Yet the uncontrollable flood beat into her chest, strangling her, leaving her hands shaking. She

pressed her palm over her mouth, desperate to cover the sound. She didn't want him hearing her, nor did she want to draw the attention of any of her soldiers.

She collected herself, forcing herself to eat. The food did not go down easily, her stomach protesting with each swallow, her mouth unwilling to chew. She felt as if her sense of taste was dulled and the mere idea of pressing anything past her lips nauseated her. She knew it would lessen the trembling in her hands, though, and it brought some warmth back to her body by the time she was finished. She peeled off her bloodied clothing, using the basin to cleanse her skin. There was blood caked into her hair from where he touched her, but she did not bother with that now. She scrubbed herself down as best she could, feeling like her skin would never be clear of him, before digging through her belongings. Normally she would have thrown on her shift, but not now. The Dread Wolf intended to return to her tent and she was not going to have him staring at her in her nightclothes. Her stomach sank at this realization, noting how only hours before she would have cheekily relished the opportunity to expose more of herself to him, feeling completely comfortable in his presence while secretly hoping to tantalize him with her display.

The thought of it made her sick.

The clothing she had available was sparing, but it would suffice. A pair of light leather breeches, a loose linen shirt and vest. She was securing the last of the toggles when she heard halting footsteps at the tent's entrance.

"Are you finished?"

She wanted to tell him to leave, that she never wanted to see his face again. She bit back those words, merely muttering "Yes."

He entered without a word, keeping his gaze down as he let the flap fall closed behind him, seating himself across from her. Though his eyes were reddened and strained, his expression was otherwise passive and unmoved. There was a stillness to him as he looked at her that she found unnerving.

"We need to discuss what happens now," he said plainly.

"As if I have any choice in the matter?" she bit back at him.

There was a subtle twitch in his brow as he paused, but he quickly smoothed it away. "I pledged to assist the Inquisition and you are the Inquisitor. The nature of my involvement within your organization remains your decision."

"How generous of you," she sneered. Though he was, for the most part, calm and collected, she could see subtle gestures that she recognized from how intimately she'd known Solas. The way his fingers were curling into loose fists as he rested them against his legs, how the side of his neck moved ever-so-slightly, how he gave a small subdued shake of his head as he spoke. He was uncomfortable.

It's not what she expected from him.

"I am uncertain if you are aware of precisely what happened today," he began, his voice flat and passionless. "While I am Fen'Harel, the extent of my power was limited for a time. Since our meeting, I have given the full extent of what I was capable of to your service. Due to a complication with the Rite of Tranquility, my power has been restored to me. While my abilities are not infinite, I am now as I once was – a being whose magical proficiency is great enough that there have been those who consider me a god." He paused as if waiting for comment, but she said

nothing. “While I understand it is unlikely that you hold my counsel with similar regard anymore,” he continued, “I would point out that you now have an ally who is better suited to assist you in your fight against Corypheus. I would think carefully before dismissing a god-like being as you prepare to face a man who strives to attain godhood.”

She remained silent for a time, thinking. “And why should I trust you to help me?”

“I know you do not believe me,” he said cautiously, “but I have not been dishonest in my actions. My intention to offer aid has always been genuine, as well as...” He stopped himself. “As well as other things that have come to pass between us,” he finished. “No matter what you may think of me, it should be clear that I wish to see the Breach healed. Permanently. Corypheus must be stopped and I have done nothing but offer my support in that endeavor.”

She couldn’t deny that. Solas... *Fen’Harel*... had been nothing but helpful in their struggle. Without him, the anchor would have killed her and the world would have had no hope of sealing the Breach. Without him, she wouldn’t have learned how to manipulate the power of the mark. Without him, she would have died a hundred times over from injuries that he healed- today being no exception. Her instincts told her that there had to be more to it. There had to be something he wasn’t telling her. He was a powerful ally to have, however – if she could trust him.

It felt foolish to tell him to go and just as foolish to tell him to stay.

It was clear there was more he wished to say, but he was second-guessing himself. “I assure you, I had no intention of becoming so intimate with you when this began,” he said softly, not meeting her eye as he broke the silence between them. “There was nothing to be gained from that, in terms of my deception. In fact, it was an ill-advised complication that put both of us at risk. I apologize for that. It was selfish of me. But my feelings for you have always been genuine. I hope you can see that – if not now, then one day.”

“Nothing about what we had was real,” she said firmly. His eyes closed, his brow furrowing, but he made no argument. “There is nothing you can do to convince me otherwise, Wolf.”

He was silent, his jaw clenching tightly before he lowered his head. “Ma nuvenin,” he muttered quietly. He looked heartbroken. Defeated.

*No. It’s just an act.*

While she felt as though she would regret this, she was more comfortable with the idea of being able to keep an eye on him than having him out of her sight. “You will stay,” she said. “But only if you do *exactly* as I order you to. You do not question me. You do not act of your own volition. You do *nothing* without consulting me first. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes,” he said with a simple nod. When his eyes opened, he lifted his head, holding her gaze. There was no heat or strength in his look. Just passive acceptance. “And what will you tell the others of me?”

She hesitated. If word spread that the Herald of Andraste had paired herself with an evil Elven god, it was certain to shake the religious foundation of the Inquisition and their supporters. Though she did not share their faith, she had to take that into account. A number of her associates were devout Andrastians, including her advisers. Would they even believe her if she told them?

“As much as it sickens me,” she spat, “I will keep your secret. For now. As far as anyone else is concerned, you’re still Solas. But know that I am watching you. If you give me a reason to doubt your loyalty, I will not hesitate to tell them who you really are.”

“Understood,” he murmured.

“Use your restored powers within reason so you don’t make it obvious to the others that something’s changed. I’d recommend not shape-shifting,” she sneered. “It’s a little obvious. Very sloppy of you, Fen’Harel. And to think you could have kept right on deceiving me if you hadn’t.” She took no pleasure in the remark, nor did he in hearing it. It was true. Had she not seen him as the Dread Wolf, the thought would not have even crossed her mind. They would be sharing this tent together in an entirely different fashion – comforting each other on the close call they had with the Templars, reassuring her that they had not succeeded in taking her lover away. She would have been eager to pull him into her arms, to hold onto him, to reacquaint herself with his scent and his touch and his taste and convince herself that his place was at her side and he wasn’t going anywhere.

She took a breath, a pit forming in her stomach. “You’re dismissed. Have one of the men find you another tent for the night,” she said coldly, watching him. He stared at her for a moment. She could see his mind was elsewhere – a look she knew well. A look that told her there were things he wanted to say but would not permit himself. How could she have seen that look so many times before and not known he was lying to her? Why did she never push? Why did she hold his privacy as more important than striving to know the truth of his thoughts? She had always assumed, when she saw his mind grow distant and his words hesitant, that he was pondering something private, something that made him uncomfortable, something that he would one day trust her with.

It never even occurred to her that she was seeing his mask slipping, peering at small glimpses of the Wolf behind her lover’s face.

He said nothing, lifting himself to his feet and leaving her. She laid herself out on her bedroll, shuddering, trying to steady her breaths.

She didn’t know where any of this was leading. She didn’t know what to think or what to feel. But assuming he was a man of his word – something she had little reason to believe – she now held the Dread Wolf on her leash. She could use that, if she was careful.

In the beginning, Solas had been the only one keeping her alive. Now, in the end, Fen’Harel could be her best shot at stopping Corypheus.

## Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Ma nuvenin - As you wish.

*I had wanted to write a second chapter that would give Tranquility some sort of conclusion, but quickly realized that was an impossible feat. This will inevitably have to be a mutli-chapter piece... and one that I am writing by the seat of my pants. It is both exciting and intimidating to work without a clear plan in mind, but I have vague inklings of where this will go. I will update it when I can, though I cannot promise the same regular schedule that I intend to keep with Isala Arla.*

You can read part of this chapter from Solas's perspective in the [Tranquility Bonus Material](#) fic.



## Chapter 3

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“What happened between you two?”

Isii glanced at Dorian briefly before looking over her shoulder. Fen'Harel stayed a comfortable distance behind them, silent as he had been through their journey so far. She shuddered as a stream of cold rain tricked down her neck, pulling her hood up higher as her eyes fell back to the path ahead. Bull strode a few paces in front of them, his war hammer slung over his shoulder, seemingly unhindered by the weather as his eyes scanned the distance for any possible danger. The Waking Sea was stirring, angered by the storm winds that whipped past them as they inched along the rocky shore. “I don’t know what you expect me to say.” She responded quietly.

“Saying anything at all would be a start.” The mage said, peering at her from under his cloak. “I mean, I know you two are no longer an item. You didn’t exactly have to be explicit in telling me that. Your regular visits to the rotunda stopped weeks ago and things get rather chilly when the two of you so much as look at each other. I assume you perceive me as some sort of half-wit if you thought I wouldn’t notice.” He reached out, touching her arm when she didn’t reply. “I’m not asking as a gossip, Isii. I’m asking as your friend. You know you can always talk to me.”

“It’s complicated, Dorian.”

“I’d imagine it would have to be.” He said, frowning. He was looking at her, clearly waiting for an explanation. One she didn’t know how to give. She glanced back once more and this time her eyes met the Dread Wolf’s. “You don’t have to keep looking over your shoulder like that, dear.” Dorian chided. “It’s not like he can hear us from back there.” Except she knew that he could from the way he was watching her, his face partially shielded under his hood. His expression was as it always was, as it had been since the moment she agreed to keep his secret – a steady and cold mask, showing nothing. “Though with you being so shiftier around him, I can’t help but assume the worst.” When her gaze met Dorian’s, he looked deeply concerned, his brow furrowing as his voice lowered further. “He didn’t do anything to hurt you, did he?”

“No,” she said quickly. “No, Dorian, it’s just...” Her words failed her. There was nothing to say. She desperately wanted someone to talk to. She needed support, needed to feel like there was someone in her life who legitimately cared for her. But there was no conceivable way for her to explain what she was going through. How she couldn’t look at him without seeing both Solas and Fen'Harel – the man she once thought was the love of her life and the trickster god her Keeper always warned her about. As First, it was supposed to be her mission to always be wary of him, to one day protect her people from his influence. Yet when he stood before her, what had she done? Followed him around like some lovesick fool, hanging off of every word and affection, drinking it in as if it were the greatest kindness she’d ever known. She’d believed in the illusion so deeply that she entertained the idea of abandoning her clan when this was all over so she could stay with him. She would have walked away from it all, forsaken her own people and her responsibilities as First, for a lie.

It made her doubt herself in ways she never had before.

“Everything’s fine,” Isii said, though it was a placation. She forced a small smile, trying to reinforce the lie further. “I appreciate your concern, Dorian. I really do. But I’ll be alright.”

He didn't look convinced, but it was enough to quiet him. A distant purr of thunder rolled out over the churning waves. Not a roar that promised a cataclysmic storm, but enough of a rumbling to give her pause. "How much further is this damned place, Solas?" Dorian called back to him, glancing over his shoulder. Fen'Harel picked up his pace silently, increasing his stride to draw closer, apparently unwilling to shout over the wind.

"They do not call it a lost temple without cause," The Dread Wolf said simply. "As far as I know, it has been a very long time since anyone has set foot in the place. But it should not be much further."

"You do take us such interesting places, my dear," Dorian said, addressing Isii once more, "but I have to say I am not exactly jumping at the prospect of being trapped in some dank ruins should the storm get any worse."

She wasn't exactly relishing the idea either. Though she wanted to keep an eye on him, she had been avoiding spending time with the Dread Wolf. The idea of being stranded in his company with nothing to pass the time made her uncomfortable. "We'll make this quick." She made that promise with no real concept of whether or not she could keep it. This journey had been under Fen'Harel's advisement. He suggested they seek out an old temple that once belonged to Dirthamen. Inside there would be an artifact of great value to the Inquisition, or so he claimed. When she pressed him for information, trying to find out how to retrieve it herself, he said it was a task that he alone could complete.

She could have sent him to the Waking Sea on his own. It would have been easier then. But she didn't trust him enough to let him out of her sight.

Fen'Harel said nothing as he pulled ahead of the three of them, walking swiftly and effortlessly across the rough and jagged rocks that stood in their path. He stilled for a moment, eyes scanning, seemingly trying to sense something as the trio picked their way carefully along the difficult terrain. "We have arrived." He said simply, pressing forward. The path took him up a high ridge overlooking the roaring waves and the rest of the party followed, albeit at a slower pace. The rain mixed with the salted residue that coated the rocks, creating a glistening slickness that made her boots' grip feel uneasy. The Wolf appeared undeterred, moving with a grace that, once, she would have admired. Soon, she could see a small constructed stone archway – the only true visible sign that anything not shaped by nature lay ahead of them. The Wolf passed through it briskly, disappearing inside as the others struggled to catch up.

When Isii reached the steep stairs leading down into the temple, she found Fen'Harel standing before a shimmering barrier that stretched from wall to wall. With a wave of his staff, he lit the two torches that bordered the entry, flooding the room with a dim, flickering light. Dorian and Bull descended behind her, the mage letting out an annoyed huff as he spotted the magic suspended in front of them. "Well isn't that marvelous," he groaned. "Please tell me we did not come all this way for nothing."

"It is not unheard of for magics to still linger in such places, still very alive from a time long passed." Fen'Harel's eyes scanned the barrier, reaching a tentative hand out to touch it. His fingers dipped in as if it were a pool rather than a wall, drawing his hand out again.

"Can we just walk through it?" Bull asked.

"There is only one way to be certain." Isii tried to draw back as she felt the Wolf's hand slip around her wrist, but he held her firm, pulling her as he stepped forward. She could feel the familiar tingle of his magic against her skin, knowing he was imbuing his touch with energy but uncertain as to why. He pressed himself through the barrier with ease and she had no choice but to follow. The



power felt like silk slipping past her cheeks, falling away from her effortlessly, yet when Dorian tried to follow he pressed against a solid wall. He frowned, confused.

“It won’t give.” The Tevinter muttered.

Fen’Harel glanced back, frowning. “Are you certain?”

“Pretty damn well certain, Solas.” Dorian proved his point by pressing his hand against the barrier, leaning his weight into it. “Solid as a stone.” Bull tested it as well, albeit more tentatively, his hand stopped short of passing through.

Isii felt a pit welling in her stomach as she glanced at the Dread Wolf. He appeared genuinely intrigued, studying the barrier more closely. “Fascinating,” he muttered.

“How do we break this thing?” Bull asked.

“I don’t believe you can,” Fen’Harel admitted. “I have heard rumors of such places being protected by spells that allow the People to pass through, restricting access to all others, yet I have never witnessed such a thing.” He dipped his fingertips against it again, the magic rippling at his touch unlike the firm and unmoving glow that surrounded Dorian’s pressing. “Such magics are lost to the ages. I doubt there are many left who would have the first idea on how to allow you access.”

Isii’s eyes were narrowing in on Fen’Harel, but he seemed honestly surprised. “You have got to be kidding me.” Dorian grumbled. “So what precisely are we supposed to do, hmm? Twiddle our thumbs?”

“It appears you have no other option than to wait,” Fen’Harel answered. “We will move swiftly. Hopefully this will not take long.”

“Hopefully,” Dorian repeated, letting out an exasperated sigh. “Oh, well, yes. So considerate of you, Solas. Do scurry along while we sit on our hands and chat about the horrendous weather. I’m glad I came along for this little trip. So far it’s been a true pleasure.”

Fen’Harel gave an apologetic shrug and turned, pressing forward into the shadows. Isii followed, her fists balling up at her sides as he reached for an unlit torch, sparking it with veilfire.

“You made the barrier, didn’t you?” She hissed once they were out of earshot. He glanced at her before nodding and her stomach sank. The Dread Wolf had intentionally trapped her in there alone with him. “Why?”

“If I am to do what we came here for, I need to make certain there are none to witness it.” He lowered the hood of his cloak, shaking droplets of rain from the fur lining.

“Then why am I here?”

“You already know what I am,” he said, his tone even and unfeeling as he stepped across the crumbling hall, bare feet padding against the wet floor. “It matters little if you witness me performing feats of magic that would otherwise cause alarm in someone like Dorian. There is no harm in you being here. And I may require your assistance.”

“And that bit about magic to keep all but elves out...”

“Merely a ruse. I pulled you in here of my own volition.” He said little else as he walked briskly across the hall, tucking his staff against his back. In the weeks since his power had been restored to him, she noticed that he used the weapon mostly for appearances sake. It was no longer necessary.

It didn't provide any form of boost to his casting nor did he require any vessel to channel and aim his power through. These things appeared to come to him easily, naturally, a simple gesture achieving the same feat as a master mage with one of the finest staffs in creation.

The water came up to her ankles, seeping into her boots where they joined the sole, but she did not slow her stride. "So this whole time, you were planning on leaving them behind."

"When I first suggested we come here, I told you that it should only be the two of us." He answered. "You did not heed my advice, so I had to improvise."

"I shouldn't be surprised you can shape a lie so quickly, Wolf," she said. "I almost believed it myself. Then again, I already know how skilled you are as an actor."

He remained silent as they passed through another archway, the light from the veilfire dancing over a giant wolf statue presiding over the center of the room. Fen'Harel approached it, glancing down at an inscribed plaque that lay at its side as she looked up at the sculpture. "So you were honored here as well."

"Hardly." He muttered, focusing on reading.

"Is that not one of your statues?"

He let out a short, irritated huff. "It is. It was intended as a ruse or a mockery, depending on the context."

"What do you mean by that?" She asked, following as he moved toward a corridor to the right.

"It is a long story."

"One I assume you aren't going to tell me?"

"I have no intention to."

"And if I insist?" He stopped suddenly, his arm reaching out to cross over her body, holding her back as he shushed her. She could see him peering into the darkness, inhaling slowly through his nose, his head tilting. He handed her the torch, bringing his hands up in a slow, sweeping gesture. There were sounds that emanated from the inky shadows ahead, groans of the reanimated dead as his magic pressed forward.

"As I suspected." He did not sound concerned, only vaguely annoyed as he stepped forward slowly, barely making a ripple in the water as he moved. "Stay behind me and stay quiet."

"I don't need you to coddle me." She snapped.

"Believe me, I am more than aware of your skills," he said, his voice lowered to a whisper. "But my methods are much more effective." He gestured, snuffing out the torch, sinking her into complete darkness. Her eyes widened, straining. She was used to being able to peer through even the darkest of nights, but in the absence of all light, she was entirely blinded.

"What are you doing?" She hissed, her chest growing tight. "I can't see."

"And yet I can." If he meant it as a comfort, it failed completely as visions of being helpless and trapped with the Bringer of Nightmares drifted through her mind. She was tempted to relight the torch but knew he would simply dampen it once more. She felt the familiar warmth of his hand gently taking hold of her wrist, his voice sounding closer than she had anticipated as he spoke.

“Trust me in this. I will not let you come to harm.”

*Trust him?* She wanted to scoff, but resisted the urge. She knew it was pointless to fight him. There was little she could do to resist his wishes now. He was more powerful than her and he had easily eliminated the small leverage she held by removing anyone who did not already know his secret. She couldn't turn and leave with the barrier still in place.

She had to play along.

He pulled her forward, guiding her steps. Her unseeing eyes darted through the inky black space around her, aware now only of sounds. She could fully appreciate just how quiet he was, how silently he moved. Even walking through the standing pools of water, he made only a slight trickling shift with each step, so subtle she could hear the faint buzzing of his magic as he cast. She could hear the groaning dead as they drew near yet heard no aggravation, no aggressive calls to attack. Instead, she heard them wheeze, letting out a choked grunt before sloshing loudly as they hit the water. She could only assume what he had done to them, yet they appeared to cease their wordless wailing after the lapping water stilled.

She had no concept of how long she walked with little more than his touch to guide her through the echo of the falling dead. She could tell that they were turning, winding, moving deeper into the temple. Yet with each new change in direction, the further her sense of where she was in the maze retreated. She prayed he would not give her cause to run from him. If he did, it was quite possible she'd never find her way out of there alive.

His hand slipped from her wrist and she could not hold back the soft whine that left her throat, feeling utterly lost without the small form of contact. Blinded and untethered. The feeling was quickly alleviated as the room was suddenly flooded with light. She winced, blinking away the sting of sudden brightness. “We are safe here,” he said, the sound of his voice shockingly loud against the extended silence that had hung between them. “Relatively speaking, at least.”

As her eyes adjusted, she began to take in the room that lay around them. They stood on a balcony overlooking a grand sanctuary, presumably within the heart of the temple. Torches, long left untouched, now flickered with veilfire, lit simultaneously by his will. He did not pause to gawk, continuing down a long staircase and she quickened her stride to keep up. The floor of the hall was lined with pedestals, each empty, presumably awaiting items of importance. She paused to peer at one of the inscriptions, but he brushed past. “These are of little importance to us.”

“What are they?”

“A part of a ritual. We are not here as supplicants. While there may be rewards that await such actions, we do not have time for that now.” He stilled near the center of the room, his eyes drifting closed.

“What are you-” He shushed her, focusing. She watched as a swirling mass of black smoke curled around him, licking at the edges of his cloak as he took a deep breath. He exhaled slowly, controlling the passage of air as the mist drifted from him, snaking away into tendrils. They shifted and twisted, marking suspended trails through the room. She backed away as one of the columns of smoke approached her, but it diverted, forcing her to shudder as it slipped past her form.

“They are harmless,” he said, noting her concern.

“What are they?”

“A means of finding out where Dirthamen hid the artifact. Nothing more.” He watched attentively

as the mist circled the room, all paths centering and joining once more as they drew closer to a set of double doors in the back of the chamber. He followed briskly as the black mass slipped through the cracks surrounding the closure, seeping into the room beyond. The doors were sealed but posed only a minor obstacle as he forced them open, stepping into a room filled with little more than fallen debris and a few locked chests. The smoke pressed against one of the walls, lapping the cool stone before he dissipated it. "Help yourself to whatever spoils you wish," he said, "this should only take me a moment."

She kept an eye on him, even as she crouched down to see what could be scavenged. He lifted his hand, moving a heavy stone pillar that leaned against one wall of the room. He ran his fingers over the smooth stone surface, seemingly searching for something in the wall itself. She could not quite make sense of what he was doing as his hand steadied on a single spot, fingertips splaying as he closed his eyes. The Veil began to vibrate, a hard pulse against her skin and the stone itself began to shift as if suddenly liquefied. She watched in confused awe as he pulled his hand back, the wall shifting to form an archway.

"You... you made a door?"

"The passageway was there the whole time," he said dismissively. "Merely hidden. Without my power restored, this space would have stayed sealed indefinitely. Dirthamen employed many tactics in protecting his secrets." The chamber that lay beyond the wall was small – a storage room that served a singular purpose. Fen'Harel approached the small altar inside, reaching out to carefully lift an oblong stone, round and flat, roughly twice the length of his palm. The surface was covered in carvings, swirling shapes that she could make little sense of, yet they resembled a sigil or glyph. It was a simple enough looking object, but he handled it delicately. "We have what we came for," he said. "We should not dally."

"What does it do?" She asked, following him as he doubled-back into the sanctuary.

"It is one of Dirthamen's methods of obtaining hidden knowledge. For our purposes, it will serve as a powerful tool for interrogation." He ambled past the standing pedestals and made his way back up the stairs. "When placed in contact between two individuals, it will reveal certain aspects of their thoughts. I have little experience with it myself, as it was not an object he openly shared with others, but I know enough that with careful study I should be able to put it to good use. It will take some experimentation. I am uncertain if it could be used properly by anyone but myself, but the concept behind it is simple enough. When we encounter an agent of Corypheus that we can capture rather than simply kill outright, we may be able to gain insight into what he is planning next. After his humiliation in Halamshiral and the loss of the Wardens, we need to move as quickly as possible to determine where he will strike." He glanced back at her. "Hand me the torch."

She obeyed and he sparked it with veilfire once more as they approached the darkened passageways they originally entered through. "What about the undead?"

"I took care of all those who stood along this path. If we come across any others, I will change my tactics, but for now I believe we are secure enough to move freely."

She said nothing for a time, silently following him. This was the longest they had spent in each other's company since she learned the truth and the circumstances felt strange. It was strained. The way he spoke was colder than before, more matter-of-fact, yet there was little cruelty or malice there. In many ways his behavior was very similar to how he'd been when they first met – distant and restrained, observant, and yet available to her when she needed assistance. He made no warm overtures to volunteer himself into her service, but quietly made no objection when she commanded him to act on her behalf.

The path had felt much longer when she walked it in darkness, but soon they found themselves passing the wolf statue that lay near the entrance. “You never told me why your idols are in Dirthamen’s Temple.”

“True.” He said dismissively.

“So you’re still not going to tell me.”

“It is irrelevant.” He snapped.

“He clearly thought you worthy of honoring. Perhaps he was your friend?” She was irritated when he didn’t answer. “Though I suppose he wouldn’t be now, considering what you did to him.”

She was trying to get a rise out of him. They both knew that. He glanced over at her, a hard edge to his look, but he said nothing.

“Dirth ma, harellan,” she began and she saw his jaw clench. “Did you get to savor the looks on the gods’ faces when they realized you were an underhanded snake?” He said nothing, so she pressed further. “Did you enjoy betraying those who considered you among their allies? Is that what someone like you does for fun, or was it in an attempt to grab power for yourself? Did you not fancy the idea of sharing the world as your plaything and decided to get rid of the competition?”

“I advise you not to speak of what you do not understand,” he growled.

“I’m certain there are a lot of things you would rather I not speak of, Fen’Harel.” She made a point of emphasizing his name as they drew closer to the barrier, his eyes narrowing into a glare as Dorian and Bull spotted their approach, lifting themselves to their feet. They had been out of earshot.

But only barely.

She lingered at the barrier, testing a finger against it, feeling a sensation akin to hard stone. She shot a look back at the Dread Wolf, holding up her hand. “Shall we?” She sneered.

He took her by the wrist, less gentle than before, the press of his magic more agitated as they moved through the barrier. “I take it this wasn’t a complete waste of time.” Dorian chimed, stifling a yawn.

“We have what we came for,” Fen’Harel grumbled, glowering as he took to the stairs leading back to the ridge. The wind was whipping around the entrance, rain coming down harder than before.

Isii slipped slightly against the wet stone steps as she jogged to catch him. “Give me the stone.” She said firmly.

He paused, looking back at her, frowning. “Why?”

“Because I don’t trust you with it,” she said, her eyes flicking over to the other men in their party. “I gave you an order. Now honor the terms of our arrangement and hand it over.”

“It is not some trifling object. It must be handled with care.” She reached out to grab it from him, not listening as he objected and suddenly the world went blank.

Words could not properly describe the sensation that swept over her. She was seeing without eyes, hearing without her ears. She could sense blurred visions that slowly came into focus, similar to the Fade and yet more distant. Strained. Forced. She could see herself with Fen’Harel as they had

been months before – a moment she had with him late one night in the tent that they shared. It was early in their relationship, when she found herself aching to feel his touch whenever possible. She straddled him, leaning down, teasing her lips over his as she spoke. She witnessed this as an outsider looking in and yet she could sense his thoughts, his feelings. Warmth. Tenderness. The words filtered in slowly.

*“There are things I haven’t told you about me,”* she murmured against his lips, pausing her thought to kiss him lightly, *“and things I know you haven’t told me about you.”*

*“And that doesn’t bother you?”* He asked and she could sense his mind working wordlessly, coming to her as impressions rather than anything concrete. Tension. Apprehension. Guilt. Hope.

She smiled warmly, leaning down to nuzzle against his cheek. *“I love you, Solas.”* She said, pressing a soft kiss to his skin. *“There isn’t anything you could say that would change that.”* She could feel everything he felt in that moment and everything he felt now looking back on it. Pain. Anguish. An ache that made her throat tighten, her chest constricting as if she’d suddenly forgotten how to breathe. And yet, in that moment, he had been so happy. Elated. So desperately in love.

*“I never thought I’d find someone like you,”* he whispered, trailing his fingers along her cheek. And when he whispered *Ar lath ma*, he meant it. He meant every word, every syllable, with every fiber of his being. He would tell her. One day he would tell her. He would confess who he was when it was safe. When he had what he needed. When he’d retrieved the orb.

The orb.

Thoughts shifted, swirling. A sudden torrent. An overwhelming storm. Anger. Self-loathing. An all-encompassing guilt. Guilt that clung to him, sank into him, clawed at him. Images of Fen’Harel snarling in frustration, fingertips whitened from the strain as his nails dug into the grooves of the foci. His foci. He was too weak. He needed a way to lessen its resistance, to chip away at it so he could unlock it for himself. Then thoughts of Corypheus. A risk. A calculation. Fen’Harel’s voice, repeating words he had said to her once before. *“I never would have believed a Tevinter mage could unlock such a powerful relic.”*

Her consciousness suddenly snapped back into reality, ripped away with such force that it felt as if the air had been stolen from her lungs. The Dread Wolf was gripping her wrist, having pried her hand away from the stone. He was shouting at her, the sound ringing in her ears before she could process the words. *“... foolishly reckless.”* Her awareness drifted in mid-sentence as his hold on her tightened, his face twisted into a glare. *“Was the orb not lesson enough? You should know by now the danger in touching such artifacts of power. The anchor nearly killed you once, or have you forgotten?”*

*“The orb,”* she repeated quietly, her eyes still glassy from the vision as they met his own. She stared at him for a long, silent moment and she saw something shift in his expression. *“This is all your fault.”*

For an instant, all the color drained from his face.

*“Isii-”*

She pulled her hand from his grip, backing away. Her chest felt tight, her stomach sinking, awash in emotion. The fear and shock and anger were her own and yet she still could not let go of what she had seen, what *he* had felt. All of it, wrapped into a single moment, compressed and shoved inside her mind and she needed to escape it. She turned, moving quickly up the stairs, stepping out onto the jagged rocks as the oppressive winds swirled around her, cold rain striking her skin. She

could hear him moving after her, hear Dorian call for her, but she needed to get away. She needed to clear her head. She could still feel him there inside of her. The ache and longing of lost love. How every moment that he looked at her renewed that pain. The guilt that choked him at the thought of all those who had died because of his foolishness. And such bitter self-loathing for a life filled with misguided attempts to do what he felt was right. She scrambled down the rocks hurriedly, not taking the measured steps she had before.

The fall was inevitable.

Her foot slipped and her body spasmed, every muscle tightening and straining as she instinctively reached for some way to stop herself. Her side hit the rocks hard and she rolled, barely having time to gasp for breath before she was tumbling through the air. She could barely hear the shouting over the wind rushing past her ears, the sound of the waves drawing ever closer. A panicked, anguished *Vhenan!* rang over the roar and she felt the enveloping press of a barrier coursing over her skin before she hit the water.

Then the world went blank.

## Chapter End Notes

Translation:

dirth ma harellan - tell me, trickster. Especially irksome as it is one of the things Nightmare says to Solas in the Fade.

For those of you who have already read my other chapter update this week - I really didn't intend to hit you with two cliffhangers. Sorry. I promise I will try to make it up to you as soon as possible.

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She couldn't breathe.

Consciousness slammed into her as a shock, her body thrashing against the hands that held her. Instinctively, Isii reached to grab her attacker, certain she was being strangled in the haze of her panic, unable at first to realize that their grip was against her chest and not her throat. Her diaphragm spasmed, her back arching as she gaped open-mouthed for air that would not come. The arms tightened around her, hot breaths on her ear as she felt his chin tuck against the side of her neck. "I'm sorry, vhenan," the familiar voice whispered as she felt the press of his magic sinking into her. "It will be over soon. Don't fight it."

Her body was half-dragged against his own, her back pressed to his chest, his knees cushioning her on either side. Her heels dug into the wet sand, nails clawing at his arms as she shook, unable to control the urge to struggle against the feeling of complete and utter suffocation. She tried to open her eyes but they did nothing but burn, swollen and aching as she tried to blink back blurred shapes. A salted searing scraped at her lungs, surging up through her throat. She gagged, her stomach heaving on reflex as a frothy mix of saltwater began to pass from her lips. He leaned her to the side, cradling her head with one hand as his magic drew the water from her lungs, his breaths heavy and quick against her neck. Her chest tightened, the remnants of the sea now pouring from her mouth as she retched, gasping hard when her airway finally cleared. The greedy gulp of air sent her into a fit of hacking coughs, rattling what remained of the debris in her lungs. She could feel him shudder with a relieved sigh as he released the press of his magic, his arms still around her as her coughing slowly subsided. She let her weight fall back against him, unable or unwilling to move - it didn't matter which. Her head angled to his shoulder, eyes closed and they remained there a moment, silent save for their mutual need to catch their breath. She shivered as the wind tore at her saturated clothes, rain licking her face. It was only then that she realized he was also soaked through.

"You came in after me," she rasped, her throat raw.

Fen'Harel paused briefly. "I did." His fingertips tentatively pushed back wet tendrils of hair that stuck to her cheeks. "When I saw you fall, I thought-"

She flinched at the brush of his hand, turning her face away from his touch. "You called me vhenan," she said, interrupting him.

She could feel the tension in his body. His hesitation spoke louder than his words as he pulled his arms away, releasing his hold on her. "A slip of the tongue," he muttered quietly. She wasn't surprised. She'd made herself very clear before that he wasn't allowed to use that word with her anymore. Yet now she knew its true context. She knew he meant it when he called her his heart. She didn't know what to think or feel about that, yet the thought of it made a dull, hollow pit form in her chest.

She blinked back the raindrops that collected like swollen dew on her lashes. The sharp sting of salt bit at eyes, making her tear-up, but her vision was beginning to clear. She turned her head to look around, the movement taking more effort than she had anticipated. Every part of her hurt. Muscles strained and fatigued, her head swimming in a clouded daze. "Dorian and Bull. Are they-"



"They are nearby," he answered, "Scaling down the rocks in order to reach us, I would imagine. I didn't exactly stop to consult them."

"And the stone? We still have it?" She struggled to bring her voice to anything above a whisper.

"The artifact is with Dorian." She could hear his breaths stilling and when he spoke next, there was a waver in his throat. "Isii... whatever you saw-" His words halted as the sound of Bull's voice echoed nearby.

"Now's not the time," she said as the rest of their party drew near. She knew she would have to speak to him about the orb. She would demand answers for what she'd seen. Yet part of her was thankful that their circumstances made a private conversation difficult. It would give her time to collect her thoughts, her mind still reeling from the realization. Over a matter of weeks, he had gone from the simple apostate Solas to the god Fen'Harel - and now she knew he was the cause behind everything they were fighting against. It was too much to think about. Too much to bear. There was a reason she ran, as foolish as that choice had been. The initial overwhelming shock was passing, leaving her with even less surety than before.

Dorian was the first to arrive at her side. "Are you alright?"

Isii slowly sat forward, drawing herself away from Fen'Harel. Even that simple movement was stiff and painful. "I've been better," she rasped. It was difficult to speak over the storm, the rain pounding down against each churning wave that lapped the shoreline.

A low roll of thunder rumbled, sounding much closer than before. Dorian frowned, glancing briefly out over the horizon. "Can you move?"

"I would not recommend it," the Dread Wolf answered quickly.

"Well we can't just stay out here."

"I got it covered," Bull leaned down, offering his hand to Isii. "As long as you're fine with being carried, Boss."

Isii gave a tired nod as she took his hand, letting him help her up into his arms. It was a strange sensation, to say the least. Bull was so much larger than she was, his muscles feeling more like hard stone than soft flesh, but at this moment she wasn't picky. She wanted to get out of the rain.

Fen'Harel picked himself up, trying to shake the wet sand from his cloak, the soaked material weighing heavily against the clasp at his throat. "Moving back into the ruins may be the best solution. We can wait out the storm and take the time for a proper healing."

"As good a place as any," Dorian said, following closely as Bull took the lead, heading carefully back up the rocky path. "Would you kindly explain what in the Void just happened back there?" He asked, shouting over the wind. "Why did you run off like that?"

Isii hesitated, glancing back over Bull's shoulder, her eyes meeting the Dread Wolf's. Though his face remained unmoved, she could tell there was an uneasy tension in his eyes. "Dirthamen's stone," she said quietly, each word taking significant effort, her voice scraping against the raw flesh of her throat. "It pulled me into a vision. It's hard to explain, but..." The lie wasn't coming to her easily. "It was like I was sleepwalking. I wasn't aware of my surroundings." It seemed a far more reasonable explanation than saying that she was overwhelmed by seeing inside her former lover's mind. She watched Fen'Harel as he lowered his gaze, his face drawn tight with concern. It was subtle, as all things were with him, but she knew his mannerisms. He was puzzling over his

thoughts, though the nature of what was on his mind eluded her.

Bull set her down once they reached the base of the stairs, the rain slowly trailing down each step like a trickling fountain. The barrier still shimmered, humming softly in the faint glow of the still-lit braziers. Fen'Harel knelt at her side, prepared to start healing her, but she grabbed the front of his shirt, pulling him down with a firm tug until his face was level with her own. "Why don't you see if you can lower the barrier, *Solas*." Using that name felt like an insult on her tongue, but she could see he understood her meaning. "We would be better off if we could move further in where the storm won't still be pouring down on us."

His lips pulled into a thin line but he nodded, withdrawing. Dorian tended to her then, helping her strip off her cloak and jacket. She shivered, her linen tunic sticking to her skin as he pressed his hands to her. He was not as proficient in healing magic as the wolf was, but he still knew enough to help patch her up, to ease the strain in her muscles that sent twinges of pain through her with each breath, to soothe the rasp in her throat. While the process was usually quicker and more efficient with skin-to-skin contact, she appreciated that he worked through her clothing. She felt exposed enough with how sheer her shirt had become, soaked through so that little was hidden, her breastband clearly visible. She didn't care if Dorian or Bull saw her this way. She had never been shy about her body and there was no room for embarrassment among friends.

Yet with Fen'Harel there, any level of exposure made her feel vulnerable.

She watched him as he stared up at the barrier, playing his role convincingly enough. For the Dread Wolf, all it would take was a simple gesture and the wall would dissipate, but for *Solas*, it was an obstacle to puzzle over and experiment with to figure out a way through.

"He jumped in straight after you, you know," Dorian whispered, keeping his voice low for her ears only. It made little difference. She knew the wolf was likely to hear anything they said at this distance. "Practically threw the artifact at me and jumped. Damn bit more graceful than I would have given him credit for, but I was certain the poor blighter was going to crack his head on the rocks. Then we'd be short two elves and have a lot of explaining to do once we got back to the Frostbacks." He smiled weakly at his own joke before his face fell to a more serious shape. "You didn't see his face, Isii. He was... I don't know if it changes anything, but he still cares about you a great deal."

"I know," she answered quietly. Fen'Harel paused, his eyes meeting hers for the briefest of moments before quickly returning to his task.

"I just thought you should know," Dorian said with a shrug. "What you make of that is up to you."

Neither Dorian nor Bull suspected a thing when the field of energy came down. The Dread Wolf didn't say a word when he offered his hand to help her up and she remained silent as she took it. She was unsteady on her feet but able to walk, refusing his support when he attempted to assist her. She shrugged away his touch and he did not approach again.

Time ticked by slowly as they sat in the temple, sheltered in one of the few dry spots near the entrance. Dorian summoned a ball of flame that Fen'Harel then bound into a form of stasis, able to maintain itself without a source of fuel. He removed his cloak and vest, dressing down in much the same way she had – left only to his tunic and breeches while all else was laid out to dry. Isii sat close to the flames, eager for warmth. She wrapped her arms around herself, both to soothe her shivering as well as for modesty's sake, keeping her eyes down even as the wolf watched her from a distance.

Firelight flickered against the walls, casting sharp shadows on the statue of Fen'Harel that stood

guard over them. There was an awkward silence that Dorian occasionally filled with small talk, though the elves were clearly difficult to engage with. Both sat quietly, withdrawn, awaiting a conversation that was inevitable and yet could not be held in mixed company.

“You were curious about the statue,” Fen’Harel offered quietly, breaking their silence as Isii turned to look at him. His eyes briefly drifted over their companions, choosing his words carefully. “In the Fade, I have heard stories dating back to a time when this temple was thriving; a palace as much as it was a place of worship, where followers believed their god literally took residence.” His story was cloaked in an old script, one she now knew to see past but was recited nonetheless for their shared company. “Such beliefs were not uncommon. Temples were considered much like the estates of royalty are today, where one may spend years drifting from one home to another, as best suits your tastes. But this – this was said to be Dirthamen’s holiest temple. The one he chose for permanent residence, save only for when his affairs drew him away.

“To honor another of his kin here would be seen as a great gesture of good faith. But the legends say it was a ruse, a way to bolster a false offering of friendship and alliance when there was nothing but ill-will behind the undertaking. Fen’Harel had dealings with Falon’Din that were... unsavory,” he said delicately. “Mythal called upon him to act in a manner that the twins found quite disagreeable. Dirthamen was not one to forgive such actions, but knew the blade would sink deeper if he played the role of a friend, rather than a foe.”

“Not an uncommon theme among the gods, it would seem,” she said dryly.

He paused, nodding. “The Game is much older than Orlais, da’len.”

It was not an endearment he had ever used with her with any frequency, though it felt somehow wrong to correct him. He was more than a hahren – he was older than she knew, older than she could probably comprehend. How could he see her as anything more significant than a fleeting thought, a small drop in an endless sea, a life so incredibly short that it would be gone in an instant comparatively?

Even so, he loved her.

It made no sense.

Night fell, thick inky shadows dropping the level of light lower in the temple while the storm showed no signs of slowing. Dorian put up a fuss about their lack of blankets or bedrolls when it became clear they would be staying there for the night, but there was little they could do about it. He huddled up close to Bull when the pair readied for sleep. He declared it was “strictly for warmth,” though it was obvious there was more to it. It was no secret to Isii that the two of them had been growing closer, despite the fact that Dorian had his reservations in discussing whatever that coupling was becoming.

Isii waited. The longer she sat in silence with the Dread Wolf, the deeper the pit in her stomach grew, but she wanted to be certain that Dorian and Bull were asleep. She needed to ensure that she could speak to him alone. When she could no longer bear it, she took a deep breath, steeling her resolve as she pushed herself to her feet. “We need to talk,” she whispered. “Privately.” She began to pull away, intending for him to follow, but he stopped her with a light touch.

Their eyes met and for a moment he looked *different*. Pained. As if he was dreading what was to come.

“Sit,” he murmured. She peered at him curiously but obeyed, taking a seat in front of him. He drew his hands out in a sweeping motion, fingers hovering above the ground as the Veil visibly rippled

outward from his touch. A glyph flashed briefly in the stone beneath them and then faded until nothing remained but a subdued hum. “We may speak openly,” he said. “We will not be overheard.”

A heavy silence hung between them then. She didn’t know where to begin. Couldn’t even fathom how to put into words the thoughts running through her head, both her own and those gleaned from him. Even so distanced from the vision, his feelings still remained at the forefront of her mind, fresh like a recently opened wound. He kept his eyes down. She could see his hands anxiously clenching into half-formed fists. Small movements, easily missed if she didn’t know his mannerisms so intimately.

“I know about the orb.”

The words fell from her lips and lay bare between them. He did not speak for a time, not meeting her gaze when he finally responded.

“I suspected as much.”

“You gave it to Corypheus. You gave him the power of a god. All of this... everything... The Breach. Redcliffe. Haven. The Templars and the Wardens being used like puppets. None of this would have happened if it weren’t for you.”

“I know.” His gaze was distant, focused on nothing yet unwavering from the cracked stone floor. “I could not have foreseen the consequences of that choice. But that is no excuse. It does not lessen my responsibility for my actions.” He looked up, studying her features. “But I assure you, I never meant for any of this to happen.”

“Why?” she asked.

“I was unable to activate the orb on my own. When I rose from uthenera, I was too weak. The transition back into the waking world was complicated by my passage through the Veil. I believed Corypheus could weaken the orb’s resistance, but nothing more. I never imagined he would be able to manipulate it so completely.”

“Why did you need the orb to begin with? What did you hope to achieve?”

“Atonement.” Her brow furrowed, confused. He shook his head, letting out a slow, controlled breath. “This world is wrong, Isii. The Blights. The corruption of ancient gods into archdemons. Spirits being so far separated from the world that they have forgotten what it means to be a part of it – so thoroughly corrupted by the slightest contact because they know nothing else and are left unprepared. While none of this was by my design, it was the unintended result of my actions.” The guilt was plain on his face, heightened by the fact that she had felt its intensity only hours before. “The Great Betrayal, as you call it. It all ties back to that single act. You know only the framework of history, a story fabricated with fragments of fact. And yet you are missing the motivations. To your understanding, I acted out of spite or greed or out of little more than a sheer and unadulterated delight in creating chaos.”

“What, then?” she asked pointedly. “Are you going to try and convince me that betraying your kin was some sort of noble act?”

He stared at her for a long moment. He looked mournful. Pitying. “You think you know them, lethallan. But I assure you, you do not. You think that they exist to guide you, to provide for you, to watch over you as some pantheon of virtuous protectors. You could not be further from the truth.”

“And why should I believe that, coming from you?”

“Because they are of my blood. Because I knew each and every one of them, stood alongside them for millenia. I can recall each word exchanged between us as if they occurred mere days ago. I have watched Andruil hunt down innocents and laugh with sadistic satisfaction as the life drained from another one of her victims. I witnessed the carnage left in Falon’Din’s wake, countless slaughtered for the sake of his vanity. And Elgar’nan-” He stopped himself, his eyes closing as he took a breath. “There is no way I can make you believe me. Not without you peering into my thoughts once more – an action I would not recommend, as neither one of us knows precisely how to manipulate the artifact in a manner that gives us any control over it. But trust that I did not betray them as part of some game or out of spite. You know me well enough to know that I do not take action lightly. The stakes were much higher than mere trickery.”

“Explain it to me, then.”

He gave a tired shake of his head, continuing. “The Dalish do not speak of the way the elves were enslaved by their gods. How my kin demanded not only their worship, but their freedom. Try to comprehend what it means to be a slave when your lifespan has no limitation. When age alone cannot promise you an eventual release from your bondage. I hope that you will never be able to fully comprehend the cruelties I have witnessed, Isii. It was an injustice in the purest sense and something I hoped to disband.”

She stared at him a moment, her mind reeling. They were her gods, those she had been raised to worship, those she had prayed to and sought guidance from. To think of them as slavers was beyond unsettling. Part of her wanted to reject it outright, yet there was a confessional quality to the way he spoke that made it hard to deny. “You locked away the gods to free the elves?”

“It was not my first choice. I tried to achieve it through other means, but in the end, my hand was forced. I tricked them into their confinement. But I knew they would not be held forever. I needed to reinforce the trap – to make it powerful enough to hold my kin and the others- the Forgotten Ones, as you call them. So I created a barrier unlike any other.”

Her eyes widened slightly as the pieces began to fall into place. *A great barrier, something that kept the spirits separate from the world...* “The Veil,” she whispered. He nodded grimly.

“I created the Veil as it is today as a means to keep my kin locked away. To keep them from returning and abusing this world any further. But the existence of the Veil has had far further reaching consequences than I could have imagined. It was a mistake – a mistake that Thedas has had to suffer in my absence.

“When I went into uthenera – the elves were free. Admittedly, there was a power vacuum. I realize that and I know that the instability that created was my doing. The tyrannical rule of my people provided structure and I recognize that suddenly taking that away lead to enough chaos to allow Elvhenan to fall. But I had faith that the People would thrive in that freedom. I *still* have faith that they can. I want to remind them of what they were. I want to give them back their magic, their immortality. So much is lost with these small, mortal lives. So short. So little time to learn and grow and pass along that information before death comes to erase virtually all progress and the cycle begins again. Everything I did, I did for the sake of the People. And I cannot sit idly by and watch them suffer the consequences of my misguided actions.”

He stopped then, watching her, cautiously awaiting her response. She looked down into her lap, her fingers running over the anchor. “So this... the mark... I’m connected to your orb. It’s your magic that’s trapped inside me.”

“In part, yes.” He said. “When I saw the Breach, I immediately volunteered my services. I needed access to it, needed to see if there was a way in which I could close it. I was certain that Corypheus had been killed in the blast and needed to be certain that the orb did not fall into another’s hands. And when I learned of you...” He paused, thinking over his words. When he spoke again, there was a subtle warmth in his voice. “I could tell right away what the source of that power was. I knew that you had somehow come into contact with the orb, that by some accident you had become a vessel for my magic. Nothing like this has ever happened before, Isii. You are miraculous, in more ways than you know. I thought maybe I could extract it from you, take the burden away, but you are tied to it. It is as much a part of you as it was once a part of me.”

Those words sank into her, heavy and profound. “So once you’ve retrieved the orb...”

“Then I begin again at trying to correct my mistake.”

“By tearing down the Veil?”

“In as controlled a manner as possible, yes.”

“And the gods?”

He paused, his brow furrowing. “It brings me no pleasure to see them returned to this world. They serve as dangerous opponents and I am certain that many if not all of them will want to see me dead. But if it will stop the Blights – if it will end this cycle of corruption and the creation of archdemons – then it is a risk I have to take.”

She sat, eyes downcast, her fingers working over the hem of her tunic as she thought. “If your aim truly is to help the People,” she began quietly, “to try and restore what’s been lost...” She met his gaze then, lifting her chin, her jaw set. “I want to help.”

His eyes narrowed, his brow lowering. “Do you mean that?”

“If it surprises you that I would fight to see my people brought back to a state of security and prosperity, then you don’t know me nearly as well as you think you do, Fen’Harel.” He studied her face for a time, an uneasy wariness in his look. “We will retrieve the orb. But if you wish to take possession of it again, if you and I are to work together in this, then I need to know that I can trust you. There are to be no more secrets between us.”

She could see that he was considering the arrangement, though she could not guess as to what his thoughts were in regards to it. “And this knowledge will remain solely between us, as before?”

“I really don’t think the others would take kindly to knowing who the orb truly belonged to. It is safe to say that *Solas* would be lucky to make it out of Skyhold alive were anyone to find out.”

“I will grant you that,” he said, nodding. “If there are to be no more secrets, then I feel there is something else I should tell you. I suspect, however, that you will not take pleasure in hearing it.”

She let out a hard sigh, her eyes closing briefly. She had been struggling to maintain her composure through this conversation, as nearly everything within her wanted to succumb to the overwhelming nature of it all. Her gods were real and monstrous and she was proclaiming she needed to place her trust in the Great Betrayer. “Say it, then.”

“Your face,” he began haltingly. “The vallaslin. It is not what you think it is.” She looked up at him, her head tilting. “They do not honor the gods, nor do they act as blessings. They were a means of branding those who were held in bondage. Slave markings.” She felt a hard twisting in her gut, her throat clenching. She lowered her gaze, hating herself for how her eyes began to sting, trying to

bite back her reaction. "If someone from the time of Elvhenan were to look upon you now, they would assume you belonged to June or one of his chosen. Not a dedicated follower, but his property to do with as he pleases."

She bit the inside of her lip hard, trying to control the tension in her throat. "Is that how you've seen me, then? As a slave?"

He looked at her, pained as he leaned forward, reaching to place his hand over hers. She pulled it away quickly and he froze, studying her a moment as he withdrew. "No," he said simply, his rigid composure returning. "I see you for what you truly are. The markings on your skin would never change that. I tell you because you deserve to know the truth. Because you deserve better. If you wish, I can remove them."

She glanced away, a tight crease forming along her brow. If she did this, she could never face her clan again. She could never return to them without their scorn, without their judgment. She would be seen by all who did not know her as just another flat ear, someone who abandoned her people and her history, who resigned herself to a life crushed beneath the shemlen's boots.

And if she did not, she knew she would never be able to look at her own reflection without seeing the face of a slave.

"Do it, then." She muttered, not meeting his eye as he shifted closer. He rose to his knees, kneeling before her, guiding her chin with his fingers. She kept her eyes down, closing them against the harsh brightness as beams of light began to radiate from his hands. The spell that gave her the vallaslin was excruciatingly painful, taking nearly an hour to complete. Her ability to stay steady and silent during the ritual was a testament to her willpower, proof positive that she was ready to be considered an adult and contribute fully to the pursuits of her clan. Taking it away was quick and meaningless in comparison. A tingle on her skin, a slight buzzing that rang through her skull, vibrating through her teeth, slipping down her neck and lower. It was a sigh and a caress compared to what came before and was over in a matter of moments.

The glow faded, yet his touch remained. She opened her eyes, looking up into his face, his hands lightly cupping her jaw. "Ar lasa mala revas," he murmured softly. There was something in his expression as he looked down at her. Something different. Something she could not place. All she could think of was how he had looked at her in that shared memory, how his eyes had softened when he whispered *ar lath ma* and how deeply he had meant it. He stroked his thumb across her cheek and she could not help but shudder as his eyes traced her unmarked face. "You are so..."

He stopped himself then, tension forming in the corners of his eyes as the warmth receded from his expression. She felt the absence of his touch as he released his hold on her face, fingers slipping away from skin. He moved himself back to the respectful distance he had maintained before. "It is done," he muttered quietly.

Her fingers brushed against her cheek as if she could somehow feel the difference. She nodded, lowering her gaze. There was nothing else she could think of to say and the silence that fell between them felt oppressive.

"I'm going to try and get some rest," she murmured half-heartedly. The wolf made no response other than to nod and turn toward the fire. She moved to a spot where the cracks in the stone were relatively smooth, curling up on her side. Sleep would not come easily to her, a deep hollow pit in her stomach as she lay there, unable to tune out her thoughts. She let her eyes open for a time and she watched him.

The Dread Wolf was silent, an eerie stillness to his rigid posture, firelight dancing across his

features. His own statue loomed over him, faint light barely battling the dark shadows that consumed it.

## Chapter End Notes

If you're at all confused about Fen'harel's explanation of the Great Betrayal, the Veil and how they are all connected, check out [this post](#). In it, I lay out my thoughts on what Solas may be planning as well as what his mistake was that lead Thedas down the path to its current state of being. For the purposes of my writing, I am assuming that this theory is correct - mostly so I don't have to try and pussyfoot around the details.



## Chapter 5

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fen'Harel was well-versed with slipping into the Fade. He'd long ago mastered a number of techniques that would bring him to a point of relaxation where his mind could begin to separate from the confines of his physical form. Sleeplessness was a phenomenon that was virtually unknown to him. Tonight, however, he laid there, eyes closed, still and unmoving and completely wide awake. He tried to block out the trickling echo of water dripping in through the temple's crumbling roof, the low rumbling thunder that growled its distant warning, the slow pattern of her breathing as she lay a few feet away from him. He could find no relief, his mind wallowing in its own petty cruelty, unable to stop thinking about what her thoughts had shown him.

He knew the moment Isii reached out to touch Dirthamen's artifact that he needed to pull away. He only had time to voice an objection before her fingers made contact, his mind instantaneously shifting. It was a sinking sensation, dragged by a leash and tugged suddenly downward. Even though he recognized what was happening, he was unable to free himself. As she peered into his mind, unwittingly exposing the secret of his orb, he was an unwilling witness to her thoughts as well.

She showed him a moment they'd shared together, lingering outside of camp on one of their excursions. It was only a few days before they were taken by the Templars – a few days before everything between them had evaporated, poisoned into this corrupted thing they were living with now. One of their final happy memories and she had shown it to him in vivid detail, perfectly preserved, as fresh in her mind as it was for him.

She'd kissed him, arm looping around his neck, pulling him down into the soft grasses of the meadow until his body settled above hers. He'd done nothing to resist, eager in fact to give in to her advances. He could see that moment now as a man outside of it. It was not dissimilar from peering into a memory in the Fade, except he could feel everything she felt, then and now looking back on it – sensations ghosting through his veins, emotional responses mingling with conscious and unconscious thought. Subtle heat and pleasure, compassion laced with desire. There was lust there too which he wanted desperately not to witness. Even so, he could do nothing to stop the progression as her thoughts invaded his mind, experiencing the thrill of her heartbeat as she envisioned what she truly wanted from him in that moment. If she thought he would act, she would have begged him to take her then and there.

To feel her need was torturous, made all the worse by how sickened she was by it in retrospect.

She shifted herself beneath him, smiling against his lips as he breathed a soft moan – and when he pulled his mouth from hers she wanted nothing more than to take it again. *"They are going to notice if we come back empty handed,"* he murmured.

*"They should know by now that picking herbs is merely an excuse to get you all to myself,"* she answered with a smile. He could remember studying the way she gazed up at him then, trying to memorize each detail. The small purple wildflowers sticking to strands of her hair, the softness in her eyes, the fullness of wet lips, curled gently, slightly parted, blushed from the press of his kiss. In witnessing the moment again, he could feel her contentment, how comfortable she was under his gaze, how his weight above her made her feel embraced and enveloped- contact she didn't want to let go of. She pulled him down for another kiss and Fen'Harel wanted to close his eyes to block out the vision. It hurt too much to witness this, to remember how precious and few these moments had

been, to feel the immediacy of her genuine affection. He tried to will himself back into physical awareness, trying to force himself to move his hand and release their connection. He knew what was coming next and he didn't want to see it – yet there was no looking away, the memory streaming straight into his consciousness.

She watched him for a time after breaking their kiss, her fingers playing over the shell of his ear. *“What do you think you’ll do when all of this is over, Solas?”*

*“I am not certain,”* he answered. *“If all goes according to plan, I will be able to attend to my own pursuits as before.”*

*“Wandering ruins and seeking out new experiences in the Fade?”*

*“Perhaps.”*

She smiled up at him, slipping her arms around his neck, tracing the tip of her nose against the side of his own. *“Then perhaps that’s what I’ll do too,”* she whispered, *“assuming you’ll have me.”*

She did not see the way those words twisted in his gut, a complex mixture of guilt and doubt and a naïve hope that maybe she would want to join him once he had retrieved the orb and his course was set. All she saw was the soft curve of his lip, content and loving as he pressed his forehead to her own. *“Perhaps you will.”*

And that was the precise moment when she knew she was bonded to him.

She'd never told him she felt that way. Never said it explicitly. The pair of them had existed in a comfortable silence – lovers for the moment with nothing said of a possible future together. And yet, in that moment, he could feel that something had changed in her. She would leave everything behind – give up her clan, abandon her role as First, everything she had once treasured, everything she had trained for – for him. Because she loved him. Because she couldn't imagine a life without him. Because she wanted to follow him wherever his path would take him. Visions floated through her consciousness, ideas of a future that he knew could never be. Wandering the far corners of Thedas, making love in ancient ruins before drifting off into the Fade, growing old together, tied to little more than one another and the ancient memories they alone could witness.

And there were other thoughts there too. Of how she never thought she would ever feel this way. How being bonded was something she had always avoided. That truly loving someone so deeply was just opening herself up for eventual pain. A vague fear, something he didn't understand and yet could feel was central to her being. Loss and pain and a desperate desire never to feel that vulnerable again.

*But this is different,* she thought. *I won't lose him.*

And he could feel her looking back on that memory with the deepest, cruelest ache, trapped in a choking bitterness. She had been too trusting, too assured, too convinced that the depth of his love was as true and as genuine as her own. None of it had been real. It couldn't have been. She had been used, toyed with, deceived and had gone willingly, so blinded by what she had wanted that she never stopped to question it. She was as much to blame as he was. She had done this to herself by believing that she could be happy. In the end, she was alone. She would always be alone.

Fen'Harel opened his eyes, staring up into the darkness that cloaked the high ceiling of the temple, his expression as hollow as the feeling in his chest.

*I never should have done this to her.*

He rose to a seated position, rekindling the fire – more so to keep his hands busy than for any other benefit. Though his body was fatigued, still aching from the hard swim to pull Isii to shore, he gave up on the notion of getting any sleep. He would rest as best he could, try to clear his thoughts, but he had the sinking suspicion that his dreams would offer no relief even if he was successful in accessing the Fade.

He watched her in the low light of the flames. She slept on her side, fist curled loosely and tucked by her face, her nose nuzzled against her wrist. Even in sleep, she appeared tense. Her face was not entirely hidden behind her arm and he studied her bare cheek, no longer marred by her vallaslin.

She looked so beautiful without it.

He had almost been foolish enough to say it in those first moments, catching the words in his throat. He could not help but be overwhelmed by her. Under the fading glow of his hands, he had seen her as he had always imagined her, as he had always wanted her to be. He knew that the meaning of the vallaslin had been lost to time, but the fact that she wore it as a gesture of her faith did nothing to ease his discomfort in seeing her marked as a slave. If anything, it made it worse. The brand shamed her, proclaimed her to be something lesser, something expendable and meaningless, all the while representing her blind worship of his kind.

The Creators were unworthy of her and her devotion – as was he.

Dorian was the first to wake, grumbling as he staggered toward the fire, running a hand indelicately across his face and into his mussed hair. He stopped short when he saw Isii, his eyes narrowing in confusion.

“What happened to her tattoos?”

Fen’Harel merely stared into the flames, trying not to look as weary as he felt. “She did not want them anymore,” he answered simply.

It was the only explanation he would give.

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“Checkmate.”

Isii blinked, staring down at the board, frowning as she surveyed the pieces before she sighed, rubbing her forehead. “I should have seen that coming,” she admitted.

“Miles away, in fact,” Cullen said softly. “Admittedly, I was trying to see whether or not you were paying attention.”

“Sorry,” she said quietly, shaking her head. “I suppose I don’t pose much of a challenge at the moment.”

“No need for apologies,” he said, quietly gathering the pieces. Normally he would ask if she would like to play again, but it was clear her mind was elsewhere. Even as he cleared the board, his eyes would drift back up to her. Her head was turned in profile, looking absentmindedly over the garden. Even though it had been over a week since she returned to Skyhold without her tattoos, he was still adjusting to seeing her barefaced. It shifted her features somewhat - made her cheeks appear softer, rounder, her lips thicker. Decorated or not, her face wore the same weighty expression that she’d had for weeks now and he couldn’t help but worry. At first he thought she was merely feeling worn-down. She started to become distracted during meetings and far less

confident when tasked with taking decisive action. And while the two of them interacted far more regularly in an official context, in the few casual moments of socialization they'd shared she appeared distant. Withdrawn. He'd resisted the urge to pry, not wanting to overstep his bounds, but his mounting concern was making it impossible to ignore her behavior.

"What's wrong?" he asked. It was blunt and to the point, but he didn't feel there was any other way to properly approach the subject.

"Nothing," she answered. It was a thoughtless, automatic response.

He tucked the last of the chess pieces into the velvet-lined bag, drawing the satchel closed. "Pardon me for saying, but it's all too apparent that that's not the case." Her eyes met his briefly before she lowered her gaze. He could not deny that it hurt to see her in distress, made worse by not knowing what the cause was. He set the bag aside, leaning forward in his seat, his elbows on his knees. "Whatever it is, you know you can always speak to me in confidence. Maker knows you've provided the same for me and more when I was in need of it."

Her lips parted to speak, but she stopped herself, her fingers nervously picking at the hem of her jacket. "I appreciate that, Cullen," she said quietly. "I know I've not been quite myself lately. I won't let it distract from my responsibilities."

"That's not why I'm concerned, Isii." Her eyes lifted again. "I've never doubted you as our Inquisitor. That isn't what this is about." He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. He always found it strangely difficult to speak to her when it came to personal matters. Friends though they were, he could not completely let go of his hesitancy. "It is clear that something is weighing on you. Whatever that burden is, I would see it lifted. I'm not certain if talking about it would help, but..."

He didn't quite know how to finish that sentence, yet he felt the sentiment had been communicated well enough. She pursed her lips, her ears shifting ever so slightly – a trait he recognized well. She often did so unconsciously when she was trying to come to a decision. She curled her feet up onto the edge of her seat, her arms loosely draping around her raised knees. "I assume it was relayed to you that I was severely injured on a mission in the Emerald Graves?" He nodded. He had been informed, though only in the vaguest terms. Injuries were to be expected, given the nature of the work she was tasked with and she had already been healed and stabilized well before word was even sent back to Skyhold. In truth, it amounted to little more than footnote.

"I chose to go on a patrol to try and seek out runes, artifacts, anything I could find that might help. The scouts said the area appeared secure, so I didn't go in with a full team, prepared for combat like I should have been. It was just me and-" She stopped then, her brow lowering for a moment. "Solas was the only one with me," she concluded quietly. There was something there, some wound he could see but didn't want to pry into. He had heard the two of them had had a falling out, though he was unaware of the circumstances. Gossip had been making the rounds, conflicting accounts, speculation over why the two of them ended their relationship so suddenly. Such things were to be expected. She was the Herald and the public face of the Inquisition. All aspects of her life were of great interest to many of those who lived within the walls of Skyhold. Still, he did not enjoy hearing the things people were saying, be them true or not. As far as he was concerned, it was a private matter and none of their business.

"It was a mistake," she continued. "I walked us straight into a trap. There was an encampment of Templars hidden away and I..." She bit her lip, staring down at the empty chess board. "I always knew that there was a possibility that I would have my magic neutralized during combat. That is the nature of the enemy I'm facing. I've trained for this possibility. Creators, Cullen, you know how much I pestered you about it before."

He nodded. It was true. Once it became clear that Corypheus had turned the Templar order over to his side, she'd been determined to improve her combat training. She was very insistent about working alongside him, picking his brain about tactics and methodology and had coaxed him on a number of occasions to put that knowledge into physical practice. She had the potential to be deadly with a blade and had bested him on a number of occasions in sparring. While it was still a skill reserved for the worst case scenario, he did not doubt her abilities.

"I thought I was ready," she said. "I thought I could handle myself. But when it came down to it..."

"You were outnumbered," he reasoned.

"It doesn't matter," she said, frowning. "I should have been able to do more. I shouldn't have even gotten us into that position in the first place. I was *nothing* without my magic. Just some woman kicking and screaming and completely incapable of doing anything. I wasn't a threat to them in the slightest. I couldn't stop them and if Solas hadn't -" She halted again, her gaze shifting nervously away for a moment before she looked down into her lap. "They tried to make us both tranquil."

It was as if her words possessed a physical weight, pressing hard into his chest as his brow grew tight. Cullen was uncertain how to respond – lips parting and shutting once more. He had always viewed the Rite of Tranquility as something that was necessary, a tool to be used to keep mages under control. Perhaps not a kindness, but with little alternative other than execution, it had always seemed justified. For a number of years, he even felt it was an underused asset – a measure that should have been applied more often than it was. But the thought of her being made tranquil sat like a burr wedged beneath his skin. Of all the mages he had ever known, he trusted her most of all. If it came to it, he would place his life in her hands without hesitation. She was not weak-minded. She had never gone through a Harrowing, but he knew she was not some quivering novice who would fall victim to the first demon she came across. There was no flaw in her that warranted such a fate. He'd spent the better part of his life among the Tranquil and even so, they still unnerved him. They were not mindless – far from it. They maintained their intellect. But they cared for nothing. They had no passions. No joys. No investments or attachments. They were hollowed out into a shell of a person. Frighteningly easy to manipulate. Complacent. Tamed. As accepting as he was of it, as favorable as his views were on the use of the Rite, the thought of seeing her in that state made him feel as if the air had suddenly grown thin around them.

For a time, neither one of them spoke. Eventually she shook her head, looking back over the gardens. "Our attempt to escape saw me run through on a Templar's sword," she continued and he tried not to envision it. "If circumstances had been any different, if Solas had not been there, I would be dead." Her eyes met his, the words lying bare between them, raw and difficult to process. "I don't ever want to feel like I need saving. There was a time I felt confident in myself – that I was capable of leading the Inquisition, that defeating Corypheus and setting things right was inevitable. But I don't have that anymore. When put to the test, I failed. I should be dead or tranquil – either way, the anchor would no longer be a tool to hold Corypheus back from getting exactly what he wants. And it's no one's fault but my own."

She lowered her head, running her hand over her brow. "I just have a lot of things on my mind right now. And none of it is easy to process when I can't stop feeling like this." She took a deep breath, looking across to him once more. "I would appreciate it if this stays between the two of us."

"Of course," he answered quietly.

She rose from her seat, offering a weak smile. "Sorry again about the game. Perhaps my mind will be more at ease for our rematch," she said with a halfhearted laugh. She began to withdraw,

walking past his chair but he stopped her, catching her arm.

“You do not need to doubt yourself, Isii,” he said softly. “You are far more capable than you give yourself credit for. I have seen you achieve the impossible and yet you still survive.” He gave her arm a gentle squeeze. “You *will* lead us through this. I have faith in that.”

Her expression warmed slightly as she placed her hand on his shoulder. “Thank you,” she murmured.

“If there is anything you need,” he continued, “all you have to do is ask.”

Her smile broadened a little. “I’m lucky to have you as a friend, Cullen.”

He stared up at her for a moment before giving a nod, releasing his hold on her. She slipped away from him then, leaving the Commander to his thoughts.

## Chapter End Notes

I felt like I needed to take a moment to examine more of why Isii’s temperament is so changed since the events of the first chapter. While clearly the revelation of Solas’ identity plays a huge role in it, she’s got a lot more on her mind than simply the Dread Wolf.

In case you're curious, this fic has [a playlist of 8 tracks](#) (that I add to periodically).

## Chapter 6

They had taken her. They had taken her and he would make them suffer for it. Fen'Harel tore through the Templars' bodies, through armor and flesh alike, all sense of mercy erased under the crushing weight of his blinding rage and panic. *I should have been watching her. I should have protected her.* He had tracked them, hunted them, certain she was among their group, determined to retrieve her. Her captors learned first-hand why the Dread Wolf was a god to be feared – all lying dead by the time he found her.

When his eyes fell upon Isii's face, Fen'Harel understood with perfect, devastating clarity why he hadn't been able to sense her presence in the Fade.

He was too late.

Isii looked up at him with deadened, hollowed eyes, her blank stare making his heart fill with dread. *No. Please, no.* She did not recoil when he touched her cheek. She remained still and emotionless as his trembling fingers traced the Chantry sun burned into her forehead.

"I can fix this," he said quickly, shaking his head in disbelief. "I can undo it. There are spirits. My friends. I can have one of them reach across the Veil--"

"Why would I want you to reverse the Rite of Tranquility?" she asked calmly, speaking in a flattened monotone that made a pit form in his stomach. "I wouldn't want to go back to the way you made me feel." The words cut into him, his jaw clenching as his eyes began to sting. "You should be happy, Fen'Harel. I don't hate you anymore. Isn't that what you wanted?"

His throat clenched. He gripped her jaw tightly between his hands, pressing his forehead to hers, squeezing his eyes shut as they burned, threatening tears. "Hate me, Isii. Despire me. Detest me. I do not care as long as it means you feel *something*." He took in a shaking breath and that's when he noticed. He grew still. Breathed in again to confirm it.

Her scent was wrong.

He took a step back, his eyes searching her face. Soon his look of horror slipped into one of outrage, his hands balling into fists at his sides. His head lowered, his glare deadly as his lips peeled back in a snarl. "How dare you."

A smile curled on her lips.

"Show yourself. Do not hide behind her face," he snapped. Her brow arched yet still she nodded, her form twisting and reshaping itself. Soft flesh melted away as rows of arching teeth emerged, limbs extending and deforming until the Despair demon stood before him with its true visage. "Do you have a death wish, demon?"

Despair's teeth chattered slightly and the hiss it made sounded self-satisfied. When it spoke, its voice raked his ears like an echoing shriek, projected past an unmoving, lipless maw. "Have you not learned by now that all your efforts amount to nothing?" The Dread Wolf growled low in his throat, his eyes flashing a brilliant blue. It was a warning. A threat. He knew what the demon was trying to do. It was attempting to needle him, to feed from him, to pry into his mind in order to rob him of whatever small sliver of hope he still clung to. "He was right about you, you know. You ruin everything you touch, Fen'Harel. Even her."

The demon did not have the chance to recoil before the Wolf's teeth were on its throat.

When Fen'Harel awoke he could still taste the sickly, bitter flavor on his tongue, a phantom remnant of the Fade. He sat up slowly, rubbing the base of his palm against his eyes, trying to shake off the nightmare. The demon must have been truly desperate in order to target him. Even in his diminished state, the corrupted spirits that wandered the Fade had known better than to stray into his dreams. This meant that his emotional state had been so far compromised that the temptation he offered for the demon to sate its hunger had outweighed the risk of his retaliation. He had to harden himself once more, to push these thoughts and feelings aside. They were a distraction he did not need.

He rose from his bed, taking a quiet moment to stretch his neck and shoulders before reaching for his clothing. He would have to speak to her today and the thought filled him with more apprehension than he was comfortable admitting to. Ever since his identity had been revealed to her, she'd made every attempt to prevent having to be in his company and so he did the same. Today, it was unavoidable. He needed her assistance. He needed to test his ability to harness Dirthamen's stone. He was certain she would be resistant – and in truth, if there was any alternate route, he would choose it. He did not relish the idea of her seeing into his thoughts once more if the test was unsuccessful. There were many things in his past that he would not want her to witness.

Though he supposed that her opinion of him could not sink much lower than it already had, no matter what glimpse of his life she stumbled upon.

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“He makes you sad, but he doesn't want to.”

Isii jumped at the sound of Cole's voice, instinctively closing her robe as she turned to face him. The spirit was lingering by the fireplace in her quarters, his fingertips nervously picking at one another as he spoke, his head angled so that only his lips showed from beneath the brim of his hat. “He can see it in your face when you look at him. Eyes narrow, lips pressed, arms crossed. It's why he stays away.”

“Cole, I've told you not to sneak up on me in here. This is my bedroom.” Cole shifted his weight anxiously and when he lifted his head to peer at her he looked distressed. Isii softened her tone. “Is something bothering you?”

“Solas is so much brighter now,” he began. “Shining. Blinding. Brighter than you. Different but the same. Rays from one sun, split and fractured and reflecting one to the other. The air around him sings old songs half-forgotten but there is no more music in his voice. He misses what he should not have had in the first place-”

“Cole-”

“He hurts and I don't know how to fix it.”

“If you expect me to do something about that, then I'm sorry,” she said stiffly, bracing her hands on her hips. “How he feels really isn't my concern anymore.”

“But that's not true,” the spirit said, his head tilted in confusion.

That was not a conversation she intended to have. “You can see that he's different. That means you would have seen it weeks ago... and yet you haven't said anything?”

Cole nodded and when he spoke, his voice slipped into a familiar cadence not his own, clearly reciting a previous conversation. “The others cannot know, Cole. They would not understand my



intent as you do. They would assume malice where there is only a genuine desire to help. I know what it is to be feared by those you are trying to save and I would rather not find myself in a similar situation here. But it's different with you," Cole said, his tone lifting. "You know. He trusts you. He has to. He wants to."

"Did you know about him before? Have you known this whole time?"

Cole shook his head. "Pieces. Smaller. Like daubs of paint on a much bigger canvas. I could not see the picture but now, *yes*. I do. I see. Ancient. Alone. *Always* alone. He belonged to both and yet to neither. Their faces are always there, lingering in the darker corners. The one with the pale eyes makes him sad. He's sorry. But it had to be done. They would not listen and he needed to make them see. This world was supposed to prove that his sacrifices were worth something." He paused, his eyes darting across her face. "You don't have to be sad, Isii. You didn't lose anything. Solas is still Solas."

She pursed her lips, letting out a slow, tight breath. "It's not that simple, Cole. And I would rather you stay out of it."

"You're hurting. I want to help--"

"You will help me more by leaving this between me and Fen'Harel," she said calmly. "Do you understand?" He was clearly disappointed but nodded nonetheless. She took a breath to speak again, biting back her words as she heard the soft knock on her bedroom door. She ran her palm roughly over her face, letting out an irritated sigh. "Cole, we'll talk again later."

The spirit nodded, disappearing as she tightened her dressing gown around herself. She could not help but feel annoyed that she had only barely gotten out of bed before the Inquisition began to make demands on her time. Normally they would wait for her to emerge from her quarters before she'd be dragged into meetings or be approached with requests for aid in various affairs. She hated the fact that she could not even have one peaceful morning to steal a few extra hours of sleep.

"Come in," she called out, hearing the familiar creak of the door opening. She moved to her mirror, raking her fingers through her hair quickly, trying to shake the tangles from her locks. When her eyes shifted back to the top of the staircase, they narrowed, her brow furrowing. "What are you doing here?" she asked coldly.

Fen'Harel stood with his hands calmly tucked behind him. "My apologies. I was not aware that you aren't prepared for the day."

She turned to face him, arms crossing against her chest. "So? What do you want?"

"I believe I have made progress with the artifact," he said, producing the stone from behind his back. "I require your assistance in testing my ability to harness it properly."

"Why me?"

His brow lifted. "I would have thought that was obvious. If I attempt to use it once more and fail to control it, then any number of my memories could be witnessed by whomever else I use as a subject. If we intend to keep my past between the two of us, then you are the only person I can use."

She shook her head. "I don't want you poking around inside my head," she said firmly.

His lips drew into a thin line. When he spoke, his annoyance was impossible to ignore. "Then am I wasting my time, Inquisitor? This is the task you set me to, is it not? If you no longer wish to

pursue it, then I would appreciate being informed. I am certain there are more productive things I could be doing.”

She dragged her tongue against her teeth, letting out a short huff. “We’re not doing this here,” she said.

He nodded. “Ma nuvenin. I believe it is not an unreasonable request to ask that we proceed in some place that provides a certain level of privacy, however. Given your reaction the last time, it is clear that the process can be rather unpredictable. I leave the location to your choosing.”

She studied him a moment. She could not help but wonder if there was any other motivation behind his desire to isolate her and the thought sent a cold chill through her. “The basement archives, then,” she said. “I will meet you there when I am ready.”

He bowed his head. “By your leave, Inquisitor,” he murmured, turning back toward the stairwell.

“Fen’Harel.” He paused, glancing back to her. “Don’t come into my room again.”

He studied her for a moment before nodding once more, saying nothing as he continued back down the stairs.

Isii took a deep breath, pinching the back of her neck to ease her tension until she heard the door close once more. Cautiously she leaned over the banister, checking to see that she was in fact alone before slipping off her robe, preparing to dress for the day.

There was a time where she would have been pleased to have him come to her room. There were mornings where she would linger in bed, thinking that if she just stayed there long enough he would come to seek her out rather than patiently waiting for her in the rotunda. She had always treasured the times when they traveled together. Shared tents allowed her to indulge in his company, to wake beside him, sometimes curled up in his embrace. She used to find herself longing for those mornings whenever they were at Skyhold, wishing he would join her in her bed. Admittedly she would have wanted to do more with him than sleep if she had ever succeeded at getting him to spend the night in her quarters. Even so, having his be the first face she saw upon waking was something she used to take pleasure in. In many ways, she missed those moments with him.

*I miss Solas, she corrected herself silently. Not Fen’Harel.*

It was hard sometimes not to think of them as two entirely separate entities. For a time, she had been certain that they were – that Solas had simply been a lie and everything about him had been false. But she knew at least part of that wasn’t true. The feelings he had expressed for her as Solas had been real. Even so, she still didn’t feel like she knew anything about him. Not really. Not as the Dread Wolf. She didn’t know where the illusion ended and he began. And even if some small part of the man she’d loved had been genuine, it didn’t change the fact that he was the Bringer of Nightmares.

She could not deny that she felt apprehensive as she made her way into the lower levels of Skyhold. While it would allow them the privacy they needed, she was not completely comfortable being alone with him. She paused a moment to steady herself before opening the door, brushing into the room with her face drawn into a tight, unfeeling mask, ready to face him as his commander rather than his former paramour. He glanced up from the tome he had been reading, marking his place and shutting it.

“Inquisitor,” he greeted simply.

“Let’s get this over with.” He nodded, picking up the stone. She steadied her breaths as he stepped closer to her.

“We are going to proceed as if you have information that I need,” he explained calmly. “I want you to think now about your last meeting with your advisers. Recall what you spoke of, whatever plans you made or strategies you discussed.” He paused a moment before lifting the stone in front of him. “Now try your best to keep me from seeing that. Place your hand on the stone when you are ready.”

She took a deep breath, giving him a hard look before complying.

The world went blank as her fingers made contact with the artifact; a sudden, instantaneous absence of all sound and all light. Within seconds, she could see things. Blurred shapes, brief flashes of consciousness that assaulted her senses, moving so quickly she could barely comprehend them even as they came into focus. Before, his memories had played out as scenes, complete thoughts, preserved moments re-experienced as they once were. Now, they were fragmented. Images. Sensations. Emotions. She saw through his eyes rather than outside of them. Opalescent walls. Trees weaving and bending through glass. A woman with a scarred face screaming threats. The sound of his laughter. An elven man marked with vallaslin smirking, eyebrow arched as he twirled a stick between his fingers. *“Trust me, my Lord. They will not see me coming.”* Running, frantic, terror-stricken. Mirrors. So many mirrors. The taste of his own blood on his lips. The world whipped past him, his lungs burning, a voice ringing in his ears, commanding him to move faster. *They will die. They will all die and it’s my fault.*

She took in a sharp breath as her vision suddenly snapped back into the present moment. His fingers were wrapped tightly around her wrist, pulling her hand back as he let out a string of Elvish words. She did not know what they meant, but could tell easily from his tone that he was cursing. She was trying to keep herself from trembling as he studied her face, his brow lowered into a scowl. “I take it that was not a success,” he said tersely.

She shook her head, barely able to catch her breath to speak. “It was different. Flashes. I couldn’t understand most of it, but I still saw.”

He took a slow breath, releasing her hand. “Fine,” he said quickly, withdrawing to the table, returning to the tome. “I will continue my work. I’ll let you know if there is any progress.”

She stood still a moment, staring at him, trying to steady herself. He glanced up once more, his expression softening. “Are you alright?” he asked, his voice gentler than before.

She could still feel her heart racing, feel the adrenaline of that moment, whatever it had been. Something fearful. Devastating. Something that had hurt him in a way that she now felt with complete clarity. The emotions were fresh. Raw. It was overwhelming, making her eyes burn, feeling on the verge of tears even though she had no idea why. She didn’t know what circumstances had brought about these emotions, but it left her feeling like she couldn’t breathe, mourning the loss of something she could not even identify.

He watched her, cautiously stepping closer. “Did you see something that distressed you?”

She shook her head, trying to will away the tremor in her voice. “I didn’t... I don’t know what...” She closed her eyes, letting out a shuddering breath as her head lowered. “I just... I *felt*...” The words fell away from her. How could she describe a memory that she had barely witnessed? She flinched, eyes opening as she felt his fingers slip under her chin, lifting her face. When he looked down at her, he appeared pained. Concerned. Disquieted and sympathetic.

“Is there anything you need?” he asked softly.

She hesitated but shook her head, shrugging away from his touch. “Just let me know when you’ve figured out how to make the damn thing work,” she said, keeping her gaze down. He let his hand fall away from her as she pushed past him, saying nothing else as she left the room.

## Chapter 7

“Careful! What you carry is worth far more than all of you combined!”

Fen'Harel let out a slow, irritated breath, frowning as he opened his eyes. He had intended to return to sleep after the shrill sound of Lady Morrigan's shrieking first woke him, but the commotion the witch was making now was simply unavoidable. He rose from his bed, dressing quickly before stepping out onto the landing. Though his impression of Morrigan was that she was a rather quiet woman who generally kept to herself - this morning she was irate, harping at a group of beleaguered men who struggled to carry a large object of some sort. Its shape was ill-defined and yet massive, wrapped in protective sheeting – presumably to keep it safe for the duration of its transport.

“This should have been here weeks ago!” she snapped at them, following closely as she oversaw their slow progress across the garden. “Tis a wonder it arrived at all. Perhaps I should have simply carried it on my own back and dragged it up the mountain myself.”

The men did not respond, though most bore a noticeable scowl, strained further by the weight they carried. Fen'Harel's brow lowered, peering at Skyhold's mysterious new addition. He could sense something – the faint scent of magic in the air. Something old. Something very familiar.

His eyes narrowed further, taking careful note of where this possession of Lady Morrigan's was being deposited.

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“Vhenan.”

Isii knew it wasn't real when she heard his voice, hot breath carrying the whispered word as it ghosted over the back of her neck. This was a dream she'd had before, though the repetition made it no less frightening as she felt his arms slip under the bedsheets, wrapping themselves around her. Her body stiffened, struggling to pull away as he drew her against him. “There's no need to fear me, Isii,” Fen'Harel murmured, the sound hollowing out her stomach as she felt his teeth scrape against her shoulder. His fingers curled around her throat – not to strangle, but to hold, guiding her head back to expose the soft flesh of her neck as his mouth slowly explored it. “You know I would never hurt you. You said so yourself, once.”

“You were lying to me,” she said, making a vain attempt to pry his arm away from her waist. She tried to stop her voice from wavering, the sound catching as she spoke. “I didn't know you then.”

“And yet you miss it,” he said, his tone low and chilling as he held her in place, unable to move. “The lie.” His teeth found her ear, making her shudder, her hands clenching against the arm that pinned her. “Do you want me to lie to you again, vhenan?” he whispered, turning her head in his grip until she faced him. Isii stared up at the Dread Wolf, breaths tight with fear and something else, something undefinable as he wet his lips, his eyes drifting down to her mouth. He leaned down slowly, tentatively, watching her before drawing her into a kiss.

It wasn't hard or brutal - never rough despite being forced. She almost wished that it was as the gentle brush of his lips sent shivers down her spine. It was too familiar. Too similar. Too much like the man he'd been before. His tongue teased between her lips, asking for permission that she hated herself for giving. His grip on her neck loosened, fingertips slipping delicately over her skin and

she could do nothing to stop herself from whimpering. She kept her eyes shut tightly when he broke away, his face inches from her own.

“Tell me you want this,” he murmured. It wasn’t a command. It was gentle and earnest in a way she would expect from Solas.

Her lips twisted, twitching, grimacing. Even so, she whispered, “I want this.” Her fear didn’t make those words any less true. She missed the feel of him, his scent, the comfort she used to find in his embrace. She wanted him to touch her even as the thought of it made her breaths stop short. He kissed her again, shifting, drawing himself closer until there was nothing but the heat and weight of him above her. Her hands stayed at her sides, her heart racing, still afraid to embrace Fen’Harel as she gave him permission to caress her. His kisses trailed from her lips to her jaw, his mouth lingering by her ear as he whispered once more.

“Tell me you love me.”

She bit down on the inside of her lip, feeling her lashes grow wet along her closed lids. She let out a strangled breath as she felt his hand cup her cheek. His touch was tender and gentle and everything she knew the Dread Wolf shouldn’t be.

“Dirth ma, vhenan,” he said softly. “I need to hear you say it.”

She parted her lips to speak, yet no sound would come. Halting, swallowing, starting again.

*Keeper, forgive me.*

“Ar lath ma,” she whispered, barely giving the words breath. She said that she loved him because the words were true, no matter how desperately she wanted them not to be. But when she opened her eyes, she didn’t see Solas’s face looking down at her. She saw nothing but black fur and six glowing red eyes, teeth bared in a snarl, her body pinned beneath the weight of the Wolf.

Isii awoke with a start. The sheets were tangled tightly around her, clenched in her fists as she took a shaky breath, trying to steady herself. The darkness of her quarters felt oppressive, her mind playing tricks with the shadows that surrounded her. She sat up, sparking the fireplace with a gesture, lighting the room with a dim flicker as she hugged her knees to her chest.

She knew she was doing this to herself. Fen’Harel had done nothing to earn her fear. Her distrust, certainly – but not fear. He’d never threatened her, never given her a reason to feel unsafe. He had gone out of his way to protect her ever since she stumbled out of the Fade. Her nightmares were being driven by her people’s beliefs about Fen’Harel rather than the way he presented himself to her. But she could not help but be frightened. He was something ancient and powerful and utterly unknowable. The fact that the Dread Wolf was fixated on her didn’t exactly serve as a comfort.

Neither did the fact that part of her still wanted him.

She knew she wouldn’t be able to get back to sleep. Even just closing her eyes brought back the image of those teeth, inches from her face. She slipped out of her bed, the stone floor cold against her feet as she retrieved her robe. She needed to get out of her room. A change of scenery, a short walk, something to clear her head. The soldier standing guard in the main hall said nothing as she exited her quarters, walking past him. She kept her head down, arms wrapped around herself as she followed the familiar path to the gardens. The air was still that night, Skyhold silent around her as she leaned against a pillar, looking up at the moon and trying to loosen the tight knots in her stomach.

She was startled when she spotted the shadow moving along the walkway that bordered the gardens, a dark figure that stepped only briefly into the light before being obscured once more. She didn't need more than one glance. She recognized his profile, his gait, the way he moved silently at a swift pace. Her eyes narrowed and she pressed herself to the stone column, watching him. It was the dead of night, yet Fen'Harel moved with purpose, his eyes scanning his surroundings before quietly slipping into a nearby room. She frowned. As far as she knew, the space was little more than storage. What reason could he possibly have for going in there in the middle of the night?

She quietly approached the door, stilling her breaths for fear that he would hear her. He'd left it slightly ajar so she pressed herself to the opening, pushing it only far enough to gaze through and watch him. The far wall now housed something she had not seen before – a tall object covered in a thick sheet that he now tugged away, fabric rustling as it fell. The mirror loomed over him and she could see his reflection – how his face softened into something undefinable, his eyes scanning the glass. It was a look of wonder and sadness, his lips curling into an odd sort of smile as his fingers dragged against its surface. It did not take long for his eyes to find her in the reflection, the Dread Wolf quickly turning. Isii took a breath and pushed further into the room.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, arms crossing against her chest.

"I could ask the same of you."

"Answer the question."

He turned back to the mirror, looking it over once more. "Do you know what this is, Inquisitor?" She frowned, her eyes scanning the glass and its frame. It was old – that much was for certain. Otherwise, it simply looked like a mirror. She shook her head and he lifted his hand, touching the glass with the same level of reverence he'd used before. This time, the surface came alive under his fingers – a sudden blast that made her jump, a wave of force rushing past her like a gust of air as the glass rippled with a bright blue glow. Isii stared at it as the corner of his lips quirked, his brow arching. "Rather shortsighted for Lady Morrigan to leave the mirror without some form of barrier to seal entry. Then again, there are few who would use it as a mode of transport anymore."

Isii's eyes widened, realization slowly warming her features. "It's an eluvian?" She looked to him for confirmation and he nodded. She let out a slow breath, staring at the glass. "I used to sneak away with my Keeper's journals, studying the things she had yet to teach me. There wasn't much in there about eluvians, but I read and re-read those passages..." The words trailed away and for a moment her mind drifted elsewhere. "I never thought I would see one," she murmured softly. "Don't they require a key? How can you just activate it like that?"

"One does not need a key for a door that has been left unlocked," he said simply. "The principle is much the same."

"You said it was Morrigan's?"

He nodded. "It would appear that her claims of arcane knowledge are not quite as exaggerated as I had assumed."

"How did she ever find one? Aren't they rare?"

"Incredibly," he said. "This is the first one I've seen that remains intact and active." He gazed at it again, clasping his hands behind his back. "There was somewhere I had intended to go, assuming my suspicions about the eluvian proved true."

“Right now?”

“That was my plan,” he said flatly. “It should not take me long, depending on where this mirror exists. I would be back within Skyhold before sunrise.”

Isii hesitated and then shook her head. “If you’re going, I’m coming with you.”

“Do you not trust that I will return?” Her silence spoke for her and soon he nodded. “I see. Do you wish to change first?”

Isii suddenly felt self-conscious, tucking her robe tighter across her chest. If she went back to her room to dress herself, she suspected he wouldn’t be there upon her return. “I’m fine like this,” she said tersely.

“Very well,” he said, gesturing. “After you.”

She eyed him cautiously and then stared at the mirror, slowly stepping closer. She felt a sudden surge of apprehension, her stomach tightening as she lifted her fingers to the glass, testing it. She felt a cool, velvety rush against her fingertips as they slipped past the surface; a tingling mist of magic that made her skin prickle into gooseflesh. She swallowed hard and lifted her chin, lips drawn into a tight line as she took a quick step forward.

The transition was sudden, the quiet sounds of insects chirping in the gardens instantly vanishing as her feet found the ground beyond the mirror. The air felt different there. Foreign. A thick fog stretched out in every direction, a grey and formless emptiness obscuring the horizon into a vague blur. There were trees there, unlike any she had seen – spherical and strange, far too symmetrical to be shaped by nature. There were spires and towers and crumbling ruins, the remnants of buildings she could not identify. The ground was littered with broken stone tiles set among bare patches of earth – the mere suggestion that a road had once been there. Hundreds of mirrors dotted the landscape like giant tombstones in the mist. It felt vacant. Hollow. Lifeless.

The mirror let out a soft buzz and for a second she feared it was closing behind her. Fen’Harel stepped through, his expression changing quickly as he took in their surroundings. As always, his look was nearly impossible to decipher, but he appeared quieted as he lifted his hand, the mirror falling dormant behind them. He stood silent for a time, his eyes slowly scanning the horizon.

“What is it?”

He took in a breath, giving a soft shake of his head as if returning his thoughts to the present moment. “It is not how I remember it,” he murmured. He began to walk along the broken pathway as Isii followed, frowning.

“What do you mean?”

He did not answer her, approaching one of the nearby trees. His brow was furrowed, puzzling over something as he reached his hand out, brushing it against the smooth bark. She could see a soft glow spread out from his fingertips, igniting like veins of lyrium along the length of the trunk and suddenly it was sprouting, verdant. Lush leaves spread across the branches, the grass below blushing with color, waxy and full of life. It all faded the moment he drew his hand away and Isii stared at him, perplexed.

“This place is a construct,” he muttered, “crafted by magic ages ago. Once, it would have put the finest gardens of Orlais to shame. But it appears the structure is deteriorating.” He moved away from the tree, continuing down the path.



“Is it safe?”

He glanced over as she fell into stride beside him. “If I feared it would collapse around us, I would have immediately had us return to Skyhold. I cannot say how much longer the midlands will exist without some sort of restoration, but I would think of it in terms of decades, not mere moments.”

“The midlands?”

“There was never a proper name for this place in Common. Midlands is a sufficient translation.”

They both fell silent for a time. Isii studied her surroundings with a cautious eye, hugging herself as they walked. Fen'Harel looked solemn, his gaze focused on the path ahead. “All of these mirrors lead to other eluvians?”

“They did, once.”

“And now?”

“You see how many of them are darkened? Their counterparts have been corrupted by the Blight or shattered over the passage of time. There is a strong possibility that the eluvian I seek is similarly disabled.”

“What then?”

“Then we turn back,” he said simply.

“You wouldn’t be able to fix it?”

“It would be entirely unusable from this side. Perhaps, if I could reach the location by conventional means, I might be able to repair the mirror that resides there. I was previously unsuccessful in making the journey, but in my restored state it would prove less of a challenge.”

“Why couldn’t you make it there before?”

“The surrounding terrain is precarious,” he said. “I will leave it at that.”

He turned down a different pathway and she followed wordlessly. She felt apprehensive walking into an unknown location in nothing but her nightclothes and a robe. Then again, she did have a god with her. She supposed that in itself should put her mind at ease. He slowed his pace, his expression shifting as his eyes focused on the arched mirror that stood at the end of the broken trail. “So,” he said, smiling softly, “it survived.”

She stayed by his side as he approached, sweeping his hand in a casual gesture. Another bright burst, another ripple of energy that made her suck in a breath and the mirror glowed, open and waiting. “Where does it lead?”

“Someplace I have not been in a very long time,” he whispered. “I will enter first, in case there is danger. Wait for me.”

“You’re not leaving me here,” she quickly objected.

His brow arched as he glanced over his shoulder. “I do not exactly relish the idea of walking you into the middle of a nest of spiders, or whatever else may have taken residence in my absence. It was your idea to come along. These are the terms.” She frowned and his expression softened. “I will be gone only long enough to determine that it is safe. No longer.”

She let out a slow breath. “Fine,” she said stiffly. He nodded and slipped through the mirror without another word.

The seconds that passed were agonizing, a pit forming in her stomach. Even if she could find the mirror back to Skyhold, she’d have no way of opening it. The idea that he could abandon her there, either purposefully or by meeting some undesirable fate made her understandably anxious. Soon there was a buzzing, the subtle sound of a chime as he leaned through the eluvian, exposed only down to his chest as he reached his hand out for her. “Come, Inquisitor.”

She took his hand tentatively, feeling a small sense of security as his grip tightened. She did not resist as the Dread Wolf pulled her through the eluvian, curious to see what waited for her on the other side.

## Chapter 8

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It took a moment for her eyes to adjust after stepping through the bright light of the Eluvian, blinking back the white blur. The sudden change of scenery was a shock to her senses – the heavy scent of ozone and dust, the cold feeling of stone beneath her feet. She staggered slightly and he braced her arm, pausing for a moment as she found her bearings. Everything felt so indescribably *real* here compared to the lands beyond the mirror. It made her body feel strangely heavy, though the sensation passed quickly enough. She pulled away from his touch and he released her without hesitation.

Her eyes scanned the hall that lay before her. The room was massive, lined with spiraling arches of glass interwoven with trees in a manner she had never seen before. The trunks angled toward the sky like pillars, branches twisting through the walls and ceiling as if they were seamless. She could see through to the storm outside, watching as the canopy above quivered with raindrops, the water persistently tapping against the glass walls. The panels were splintered and cracking, the braziers of veifire casting eerie shadows across each jagged scar. Water seeped through, the soft sound of trickling echoing through the vacant space. Dappled moonlight filtered down from the canopy above, though it was sparse. The trees beyond grew so thick and heavy that they appeared to entomb the ruin in the overgrowth. There was something about this room that felt familiar – like she had been there before.

“Where are we? A temple?”

“It was, once,” Fen’Harel answered curtly. He was tense, though she could not determine why. She followed him absentmindedly as he moved down the length of the hall, her sense of déjà vu increasing with each step. There was a long banquet table that lay empty, covered only by a thick layer of dust. At the end of the room sat a throne bordered by the gnarled remnants of what once must have been two magnificent trees, long dead and petrified. The throne was a curving piece of carved white stone, pale and marbled with veins of silver.

“I’ve seen this place before,” she murmured.

“Unlikely.”

“No, I mean it,” she said. “You showed me this room the last time we used the artifact. Brief flashes of it, anyway.” She turned, her eyes scanning the expanse of the hall. “It was different then. Brighter.” The walls had been pristine, the trees healthy, their leaves lush and vibrant. Now, everything felt cold and hollow. Her eyes met his and for the briefest moment she could see the quieted discomfort on his face before it melted away into his normal stoicism.

Fen’Harel said nothing as he turned to leave the main hall, walking with a sense of purpose down a long corridor. She followed, her eyes darting to try and take in her surroundings. The walls were reinforced with stone archways, each topped with intricate keystones inlaid with gems. The curved surfaces were covered in murals, paintings faded yet still fully visible in the plaster. In the first mural, she saw a city of gold and grandeur, the sun’s rays shining off of the glittering towers of opulence. At its base lay a sea of gnarled hands reaching up in desperation. The second showed a figure in a black cloak leading a pack of wolves, their ears folded back, their heads bowed low. They were primed. Ready. Hunting. In the next, that same figure stood, smaller this time, overshadowed by the fearsome image of the Dread Wolf. She slowed her pace, coming to a stop in

front of it. It wasn't the white wolf she'd seen Fen'Harel turn into. This one was black, his eyes reddened and filled with madness. It was how she had always envisioned him in those tense evenings when stories of the Betrayer were whispered over campfires. It was the wolf she saw in her nightmares when the man she once called vhenan melted into a snarling beast.

Fen'Harel noticed her lingering, turning to look back. "Are you coming?"

She reached out, softly tracing her fingers over the cloaked figure. Even though these images depicted scenes she did not fully understand, the hand that made them was unmistakable. She knew the style all too well.

"You painted these," she murmured.

"I did," he said simply. She glanced over to him and he turned, continuing down the hallway. She followed as he began to climb a set of stairs.

"Was this your temple?"

"One of them," he said. He was being vague, keeping his answers brief. He was uncomfortable or upset, though she could not tell which. She said nothing as he pressed into a room, automatically lifting his hand. With a brief flick of his fingers, light filled the space, braziers of veelfire letting out a welcoming glow. The room that lay beyond had clearly served as a bedroom, once. The size was impressive, over twice that of her own quarters at Skyhold, filled with a number of bookshelves, wardrobes and chests. At the far end lay the bed – an impressive structure in its own right. Its frame was similar to a four poster bed only it did not appear to be carved. It was a natural growth that had been twisted and shaped, branches reaching up from the floor below and weaving together into a wide canopy. It still retained its bedding, sheets and blankets neatly tucked and covered in a thick layer of dust. She frowned, looking about the room as he moved to inspect the bookcases.

"You lived here?"

"As I have said before," he murmured distractedly, "the temples served as residences for the so-called gods. Some of us moved around from temple to temple frequently, some of us did not."

"And you?"

"This place was my home for the better part of three millennia." She lowered her gaze, her brow creasing. The sheer immensity of that amount of time was difficult to envision and yet he spoke of it as if it were inconsequential. "Feel free to look around," he said with a distracted wave of his hand. "It should not take me long to find what I seek."

She slowly walked over to the wardrobe, idly running her fingers along the intricately carved doors. "What are you looking for, precisely?"

"Information," he muttered. "There were some texts I referenced when developing the technique I ultimately used to create the Veil. I suspect they may be of use to us now."

She opened the wardrobe, frowning in confusion as she saw the condition of the items inside. "How could all of these things have survived? The books, the bedding, these clothes... they look like they've been abandoned a few decades, not thousands of years."

"The answer to that is rather complicated," he said, his brow furrowed as he pulled a tome from the shelf. He paused, huffing dust from his nose. "In short, it is a combination of factors. Primarily, this was a place of importance for a great many years. Spirits were always attracted to the actions of the Creators. We were, if nothing else, influential. Such interest increased the likelihood that they

would begin to preserve the physical remains to reflect the memories they still hold.” He flipped briefly through the pages before quietly nodding to himself, setting the tome on the desk and continuing his search. “That and I took special care to preserve my possessions. Most of this temple is enchanted to prevent deterioration. You may have noticed the scent of it when you entered.”

“I’ve never really thought of magic having a scent.”

“Put enough power behind something and it will start to reflect certain qualities unique to the caster. A scent, a sensation on the skin... they are like fingerprints, identifying the one who crafted the construct.”

“I’m surprised this place hasn’t been ransacked. Most of the ruins I’ve seen have been picked clean of loot.”

“The magic that protects this place is still strong enough to keep it hidden from prying eyes. Believe me, when it was put in place I needed to hide from individuals who were far more fearsome than a few petty tomb raiders or shemlen archaeologists.”

Isii sifted through the wardrobe’s contents. The finery held within was breathtaking. She ran her fingers over the silken material of one robe, watching as the black fabric shimmered with each movement like flecks of silver trapped in liquefied obsidian. The smooth texture was unlike any of the modern fabrics she’d come across. It reminded her vaguely of a robe she’d once found preserved in a ruin, though the clothing here was clearly of a higher quality. The interior side of each door was lined with various adornments. There were rings of varying color and shape, closure pins draped with fine chains. Hanging up high was a small facsimile of an animal skull, though how it was supposed to be worn eluded her. Below lay a flattened loop meant to be set against the collarbone embedded with pale blue stones that glowed faintly under her touch.

“I think Dorian would probably have a heart attack if he knew you used to wear stuff like this.”

He chuckled softly. “I suppose he would. You’re welcome to take anything that pleases you.”

Her gaze fell to an amulet, her fingers delicately lifting it from its perch. It was a wide and relatively flat hexagonal stone, longer than it was wide and surrounded by a thick band of engraved metal dotted with smaller gems. The center was a stunning iridescent green, shades of blue and teal suspended within like ink flowing through water. She could see the faint outline of a wolf’s head within, subtle as a shadow and yet clearly visible the longer she looked at it. She ran her thumb over the banding. She knew enough to recognize that the symbols were written Elvish, but beyond that they held no meaning for her.

“What does this say?” His eyes lifted as she spoke, frowning curiously as she held the amulet up. He set down the book he’d been looking through, closing the distance between them. He took her hand, turning the jewel up to the light, his eyes narrowing as he read.

“*From He who walks among our dreams, for protection gladly given.*” He shrugged. “Most likely a gift from one of my supplicants. Someone I did some favor for, though I could not even attempt to recall what it was now. Must have been one of the higher nobles, given the value of the item.” He released her hand.

She stared down at the amulet, her brow furrowed as she traced over the lines once more. “I wish I could read it as you do,” she muttered. “The fact that the People don’t even know their own language...it makes me sad that we’ve lost that.”

He paused, studying her for a moment. “I could give it to you, if you wish.”

She frowned, looking up. “What do you mean?”

“There is a spell in which I could pass that knowledge onto you.”

Her gaze lowered to the amulet once more, her nail idly picking along its edge. “You never thought to offer it before now?”

“On the contrary,” he said, “I thought of it many times. It would have been far more efficient than my feeble efforts to sate your curiosity. I feared it would be difficult to explain without arousing suspicion, however. It is one thing to believe I have learned much of the language through my time in the Fade and another for me to possess it with complete fluency, is it not?”

“I suppose.” She had always envied his knowledge of Elvish, even in their earliest days together. She used to feel embarrassed whenever his comments would surpass the limits of her comprehension, ashamed when she would sheepishly ask him to repeat himself in Common. The Dalish were supposed to be the keepers of the People’s words and yet this outsider, this lin’mor’varla, knew far more than she could have ever imagined. She should have suspected something, then. It felt so obvious to her now.

She lifted her head and their eyes met. “Cast your spell, then.”

Fen’Harel nodded, slowly closing the distance between them. She couldn’t deny the nervous fluttering in her stomach at his sudden closeness, the feeling stirring further as he brought his hand along the side of her jaw. She frowned as he angled her face up to meet his own, his eyes drifting down to her mouth. She swallowed hard.

“Part your lips and hold still,” he whispered, his thumb catching below her chin.

Then he leaned forward.

She stiffened, pulling away, peering at him. He looked puzzled for a moment. “I’m not trying to-” He stopped himself, a sudden look of irritation washing over his features. “Do you want this or not?” he asked, a hard edge to his tone. Isii hesitated before nodding. “Then don’t move,” he ordered.

Isii obeyed as he leaned in once more, close enough for her to feel his breath on her lips as he whispered words she could not understand. The press of his hand to her cheek, his fingertips lightly grazing her ear – it all felt too familiar. All it would take was one inch – less than that – and their mouths would meet. She could imagine that moment, that stolen possibility, his arms wrapping around her, pulling her closer, the sudden rush of fear and strange relief at being able to taste him again. The thought of it made the room seem so suddenly quiet and distant. She heard him let out a small breath, felt the brush of his sigh on her skin and soon there was a bizarre tingling buzz pressing between her lips. She shuddered as it slipped across her tongue, filling her throat within seconds. She twitched, pursing her lips as she tried to swallow.

“It will feel strange at first.” She frowned, peering at him. The words he used were Elvish, speaking in an archaic form of formality that she was utterly unfamiliar with and yet she could grasp his meaning clearly. He searched her face, his hand still cupping her cheek. “Can you understand me?” he murmured softly.

The comprehension was effortless. There was no brief moment of translation as her mind shifted the words into Common. She knew them for what they were with all the subtlety of connotation. She nodded and watched as the corner of his lips lifted ever so slightly. “Take a moment to focus,” he coached her, “then try to say something.”

"I'm not entirely sure what to say..." she paused, grinning at the utter strangeness of hearing the foreign words pass from her tongue. "That's incredible," she added, staring up at him. She felt his fingers curl against her jaw before slowly releasing his hold on her, stepping back.

"Switching between Elvish and Common should not be a problem for you," he said, returning to the bookcase. "As for reading, it will take a little time and some added concentration. Once you get used to it, you should not find the task difficult."

"Thank you."

He glanced back at her for a moment before turning toward the tomes. "Here," he said distractedly, his hand lifting in anticipation as his eyes scanned the selection in front of him. He frowned and then let out a short hum, pulling one of the books down. "You can use this for practice, if you wish. I believe it will be of interest to you."

She cautiously took the book, running her fingers along its spine. "I'll take a look at it later," she said with a nod. He silently returned to his task. She glanced down at the amulet once more, quietly slipping it into the pocket of her robe.

She slowly circled the room, curiosity driving her to riffle through his things once more. There were objects there that she couldn't properly identify. An artifact shaped like a sun or a star built from green gems and banded metal. A strange blade fashioned out of a pale azure crystal with a bronzed hilt. A katar with four long metal claws, each etched with glyphs. It all felt so strange to rummage through his belongings- like peering into a life that was once his and yet seemed completely disconnected from the man she knew. It wasn't until she found the small book filled with sketches that it felt at all familiar, aged pages clearly filled-in by his hand. She flipped through it idly as she paced further into the room. More images like the one downstairs; abstract faces and figures, rough lines showing the shape of unfamiliar architecture.

A flash of lightning drew her eye to the glass wall in front of her, thunder rumbling softly in the distance. From there, she could see the full expanse of the forest, a seemingly never-ending growth that stretched out into the horizon. There were no buildings or landmarks she could use to orient herself – just a sea of branches quivering under the weight of the storm. She stepped closer to the wall, running her finger along one of the cracks in the glass. "Where is this place?" she asked.

She did not hear him move until he was right behind her, stepping closer, his hand lightly pressing to the small of her back. She jumped, startled by his touch. "You don't have to be afraid of me," he murmured.

"I'm not."

He studied her face a moment, clearly disbelieving and yet said nothing more on the subject. His eyes moved to the glass, looking out over the forest, his brow furrowing. There was something lingering in his eyes, an unspoken quiet sadness as he gestured with a nod. "Do you see where the tree line dips down up ahead?" She followed his gaze, silently searching before nodding. He brought his lips close to her ear, speaking low. "That was once the seat of Arlathan."

She turned her head, studying his face before looking out into the distance again. When she spoke, her voice was quiet, rounded with awe. "This is the forest of Arlathan?"

"It is."

"I'd always dreamed of coming here, one day," she murmured. "A childish fantasy. I was convinced that I'd find some remnant of Arlathan that the others had missed." Another flash of

lightning pierced the sky, thunder purring close by. “I wish I could have seen it.”

“I used to be able to see the city plain as day from this room. At night, it shone like a beacon among the trees.” His voice was soft. Wistful.

“Do you miss it?”

He paused, thinking, the trickling rain casting shadows on his face as it slid down the glass. “It was by no means perfect,” he began softly, “but I have not seen its like ever since. As flawed as it was, Arlathan was my home.”

She glanced over to his bed, a thought stirring. “The spirits in the Fade here ... they would hold memories of that time, wouldn’t they?”

His eyes met hers, his brow tightening. “I suppose they would.”

She bit at her lip, looking back to the bed. “Could you show me?”

He frowned. “You want to sleep here?”

“That’s the idea.”

He appeared uncertain, the corners of his lips downturned as he spoke. “I do not know what memories you might witness.”

“What, Fen’Harel? Afraid I’ll see something you’re keeping from me?”

His frown deepened into a scowl. “It is not like that. There was a time when I was young and foolish. I have not always behaved in a manner I would be proud of today. Admittedly, I am not completely comfortable with the idea of you seeing that side of me.”

Her hands slipped onto her hips. “I can’t travel the Fade on my own. Do I have to order you to help me?”

His features softened somewhat and he let out a slow sigh. “That won’t be necessary, Inquisitor.” He watched as she stepped over to the bed, slowly peeling back the top layer of blankets, careful to keep the dust from spreading to the sheets below. “I will find a place for me to rest.”

“Don’t bother,” she muttered. “The bed is big enough for two.” Her response clearly surprised him as he stared back at her. She shrugged, her tone harsh. “It’s not like it would be the first time we’ve slept next to one another,” she grumbled, crawling onto the bed. She curled herself onto her side, facing the edge, keeping her eyes forward as she felt his weight eventually settle next to her.

“Do you need assistance getting to sleep?”

She hummed affirmatively, her stomach fluttering as she felt him shift behind her. His hand slipped gently onto her shoulder, his lips close to her ear. The words he whispered used to be senseless to her, but she understood them now, the spell slipping soothing endearments from his tongue. The effect was quick as it always was, darkness pulling in around her as her body felt heavy, sinking, consciousness falling away until she was aware of nothing more than his voice. Soon, she was asleep in the Dread Wolf’s bed, waiting for him to find her in the Fade.



Translation:

lin'mor'varla – city blooded. A non-Dalish elf.

To anyone familiar with [Facing the Wolf](#) or [Var Hellathen](#), you'll recognize this place. This chapter as it was originally written was getting a bit too long and the second-half was taking me awhile to work through, so I decided to break it up into two parts. Also, I promised my followers on tumblr that I would take a week to work on my many, many prompts - so expect that for the next handful of my upcoming posts.

## Chapter 9

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She'd never been able to explore the Fade on her own. When they were lovers, she tried to coax him into teaching her how. He explained that it was not something one could learn. Dreamers were not taught, they were born. Just as she would never be a healer no matter how diligently she studied the art, she could not will herself into having a mastery of the Fade. Even so, she could experience it with him as her guide. He would draw her from her dreams, pull her deeper into the lands beyond the Veil. He taught her how to safely interact with the spirits they encountered. He coached her on how to open her mind, to lower her guard and see into their memories. It was difficult for her at first. Everything was blurry and distant, shapeless and foreign.

But Fen'Harel had been a very patient teacher.

It was strange feeling him move within her mind again. There was an indescribable vibration, a hum, a pulling sensation as he drew her outside the boundaries of her dreams. She used to find it comforting; a tender warmth that she happily surrendered to. Now, it made her feel vulnerable. Still, this was what she had asked for.

The bedroom began to take shape around them once more. It took time for her to gain any clarity within the vision. First, she heard the faint hum of music, voices ringing in the distance. Next, she was aware of her own body, feeling the weight of it as if she were waking, the sensation of clothing that was not her own on her skin. Her hands felt at the robes, the sash at her waist, the deep dip in the neckline. They were ones she'd worn before, salvaged from a ruin, stashed somewhere within her chests at Skyhold. Her eyes lifted to the rest of the room. The braziers were unlit, moonlight streaming in from the open glass walls. She rose from the bed, her eyes widening as they fell upon the skyline of Arlathan.

It was more than she ever could have imagined.

Her lips parted, mouth open in softened awe as she neared the glass, tracing her fingertips along its surface. The city was magnificent. Glittering and altogether foreign, spires of gold and silver, stone and glass, bending and twisting into impossible shapes. Even in the darkness of night it seemed to shine as if thousands of stars suspended themselves among the towers as they reached up toward the heavens. She pinched her lips between her teeth as her eyes began to water. She chided herself for reacting so childishly, but she could not help it. This was the place she had always dreamed of, the city she tried to recreate in her mind, envisioning a time in which it could be made a reality once more. It was what her people strove for, what they had lost, why they picked over ruins and waited for the shemlen to recede. It was her birthright, her inheritance squandered, torn asunder and buried under an endless forest.

She turned as she heard him get up from the bed, quickly blinking back the gloss that had formed over her eyes. She pulled at the skirt of her robes, her brows lifting. "Your doing, I take it?"

"I thought you might be more comfortable in something other than your nightclothes," he said simply. "I can change it to something else if you wish."

She thought it over for a moment, considering how he'd responded to her the last time she'd worn this around him. The way she flaunted herself, provoking him, the hunger in his kiss. The memory left a tight knot in her gut but she shrugged, shaking her head. "It's not important," she muttered.

The sounds outside of the room rose as the music changed to a new song. Voices flowed together in an undistinguishable din broken by the occasional ripple of laughter. She neared the door, poking her head out into the hall before glancing back at him. "Shall we?"

He looked tense, hesitant as he nodded, wordlessly following. She trailed back down the path they'd taken to his bedroom, her eyes examining the space once more. There were no more cracks in the glass, the flicker of flames casting the space in a much warmer light than the eerie glow of veilfire. As she slowly made her way down the stairs, she heard muffled sounds- soft moans, a small pleased giggle barely silenced. She spotted two figures pressed to one another, stealing kisses as they hid in an alcove at the base of the steps. She thought little of it at first, despite the strangeness of knowing that she was witnessing a stolen moment of passion between two people who were long since dead. She almost walked on until she saw their vallaslin. She could see the lines of Falon'Din's mark snaking along the man's features before he dipped his head down to her throat. The woman smiled, eyes closed blissfully. As she tilted her head back, Isii could plainly see the small slashes of Dirthamen's brand. While it would not be strange to see among the Dalish, she could not help but recognize the context. These were slaves kept by two different masters.

She felt voyeuristic as she watched them, aware of Fen'Harel's approach as he caught up with her. The woman tightened her grip on her lover, burying her face against his shoulder. Her words were muffled and quiet but Isii could clearly hear her whisper "I missed you." It pained her. The man lifted his head with a gasp, his eyes widening as he looked straight through Isii. She could see the panic on his face as he stilled. "Someone's coming," he whispered.

The woman's fear was palpable. She gripped his arm, pulling away. "Quickly, vhenan." The two of them slipped past Isii, running further down the length of the hall. She frowned, glancing up to Fen'Harel for an explanation.

"Why would their slaves be in your home?"

"By the sounds coming from the main hall, I assume I was hosting a social gathering," he said. "It was customary for guests to bring one or more of their servants with them. They tended to their personal needs, served up offerings to their host and contributed to the evening's entertainment."

"What sort of entertainment?" she asked, following as he moved toward the sound.

"It varied. Musicians, dancers, gymnasts. Some of them were freemen, most of them were not; a fact I was not fond of, yet tolerated nonetheless."

She quieted then, watching as three barefaced elves approached, dressed in robes not dissimilar from what she was wearing. It was bizarre to see their eyes moving through them without recognition, the memory playing out as if she and the Dread Wolf were ghosts drifting through it. They were smiling, chatting idly, unaware of the lovers they inadvertently chased off. Isii stepped out of their way reflexively and continued on her path down the corridor. She noted the walls as they passed. The murals were gone, leaving nothing but smooth bare stone.

The main hall was an overwhelming sight. The glass archways shone in the light, prisms bouncing off of the unbroken surfaces. The trees were healthy, their leaves lush and full. The two oaks that lined his throne were breath-taking, impressive in their own right. In every way it looked like a cathedral built into the forest itself. The walls were singing with sound, echoing and ringing in a way that made her feel entirely enveloped by it. The long table was filled with people, though some of the seats lay empty as their occupants milled about the room. Barefaced servants and slaves alike, dressed in simple garb, carried endless trays of food and carafes of wine. The space between the table and the throne was set aside for dancing, musicians lining one of the walls as bodies moved quickly in time to the rhythm they played.

Isii glanced up to Fen'Harel as his eyes scanned the hall. "Do you remember this?"

His brows lifted as he shook his head. "There were many nights like this," he said, "though I can narrow down when this occurred somewhat. It would have been well before the rebellion. There was quite a long period of time before the end in which I was not particularly social. It also appears to be before I dismissed my servants, which means this temple would have still been an active place of worship. Most of those in attendance would have been followers of mine within the nobility."

A sudden giggling shriek from among the dancers caught Isii's attention. She saw a woman with white hair being plucked from the crowd of onlookers, pulled into the dance. "No, falon!" she objected, laughing as she disappeared into the crowd. Curious, Isii stepped closer. She only caught glimpses of the pair. The woman wore white, a gown of flowing silks to match the starkness of her hair which was coiled, braided, and pinned. Her circlet bore the twisting spirals of halla antlers, arching away from her temples. Her skin was dark, much darker than Isii's, her teeth flashing brightly in contrast as she grinned. Isii could not see her partner with as much clarity as the man gripped her from behind, an arm around her waist as he spun her around. She caught flashes of dark hair as the woman squealed, her feet scrambling to stay beneath her. "Felas! Felas! Not so fast, ma fen!" Isii's brow furrowed as the man laughed – a bright, round sound that she recognized all too well.

She angled her head to get a better view as the man pulled away, turning the giggling woman in his arms. Isii couldn't help but stare. It was unmistakably him. His face was nearly identical, differing only slightly as a reflection of his youth, yet that was the only trait that resembled the Dread Wolf that stood beside her. He had long dark hair, bound with cording along his back, the sides shaved down to stubble along his temples. He wore robes of black and gold with touches of green, open across the chest in a way that reminded her more of Varric than Solas. A grey stole of thick fur lined his shoulders, secured with silver chains that dipped across his collarbone. There was an ease to his laughter, a breadth to his smile, a lightness to his body as he danced that was entirely unlike the man she knew.

She glanced over to Fen'Harel before looking back at the memory. "You look..." She let the sentence hang, uncertain how to finish. He was watching her expectantly the second time she glanced over and she pursed her lips. "Different," she said delicately.

He chuckled. "A bit."

She tilted her head, frowning as she watched the younger Wolf. "Why the change?"

"Did it never occur to you that my appearance is quite intentional?" he asked, arching his brow. "I look the way I do because I wish to be overlooked. No one pays much attention to me unless I want them to. Do you suppose *he* would receive the same response?" he asked, nodding to his younger self.

"You have a point." She watched him as he moved gracefully through the dance, grinning at his partner. He pulled her close as part of the routine, murmured something in her ear and she pulled away laughing again, shaking her head. "Who is she?"

Fen'Harel let out an amused hum. "I'd have thought the horns would have given it away."

Her eyes darted to him before settling on his dance partner again, her brow lifting. "Ghilan'nain?" He nodded and she stared wide-eyed. Even after all this time with the Dread Wolf, the idea of seeing another one of her gods was still somehow shocking. The goddess's unsteady movements made more sense; the way she did not turn her head to look in the direction the steps were taking

her, how she leaned against his touch and clutched his arms as he dragged her through the dance. Isii could see that her eyes were wide and yet unseeing as he guided her across the floor.

“I always assumed her sight was restored to her when she ascended.”

“In a sense,” he said patiently. “She could see through the ambient magical energy that flowed in and around all things. Something as chaotic as a dancefloor, however, posed a challenge to her ability to focus with any clarity.”

The routine took the dancers into a turn, Ghilan’nain bracing herself with her hands to his chest, his arm resting against the small of her back. His face was bright, chuckling over something she had said. “Were the two of you...”

“No,” he answered, saving her the trouble of trying to find the words to finish her question. “We were close, but nothing more than friends.”

She saw how he looked at her, how close he was holding her, how broadly she was smiling. “You sure about that?”

His brow furrowed as he looked down at her. “Must you bed Dorian in order to bear love for the man?” Isii studied his face before shaking her head. “She was a friend. Those who claimed otherwise usually did so disparagingly.”

She turned, scanning the hall. “Are the others here?”

“A few,” he said stiffly, nodding toward the table.

“Show me,” she said, eagerly approaching the seated guests. Fen’Harel was less enthusiastic as he followed, his jaw visibly tensing as they neared. At the head of the table lay a large empty seat with a smaller one beside, a woman sitting within it, idly picking at her food. The chairs that lined each side were mostly filled, the party’s menagerie presenting a wide variety of clothing and style. All displayed their wealth openly, draped in opulence, each attempting to outdo the other. None could surpass the heavy adornment of one man who sat, speaking quietly to the figure who was seated beside him. Long black hair shrouded his shoulders, the skin of his neck and chest covered in a twisted metal framework of jewels. His eyes were dark, framed with thick lashes. He brought his wineglass up to thin lips, the rest of his features equally narrow and stark. The man he spoke to sat with his head turned away from Isii as she drew close. She could see little more than the long pale hair that sat tucked behind his ears. The first man leaned forward and murmured something, his conversation partner letting out a low, amused laugh as he shifted in his seat. Isii could see his features were much the same, strikingly similar despite their differences in coloration.

“Are those the brothers?”

“Falon’Din and Dirthamen,” he said, his tone darkening. “They were not brothers. Not in the sense that the Dalish claim. Their lack of shared blood did not lessen their bond, however. You can probably see why they were called twins.” He ran his tongue over his teeth through closed lips, his eyes narrowing. “This night had to have been before Falon’Din’s bid for power – otherwise the pair of them would not be gracing my table.”

She studied his face, frowning. “What happened?”

His eyes remained focused on the two men, his answer coming across as automatic – his mind elsewhere. “Falon’Din wished to feed his vanity by increasing his number of followers. He waged war against the People, slaughtering any who would not bow down and pledge fealty to him. By

the time Mythal rallied the gods against him, the death toll was indescribably high. I fought at Mythal's side; prevented him from slipping through into the realm of death by trapping him within a barrier. Though I take no credit for his defeat and did not act alone, Falon'Din and Dirthamen did not see things in a similar light. To them, I was the one responsible for preventing his escape. I was Mythal's attack dog and not one they were willing to forgive." His brow creased further, his voice lowering as he stared at the Keeper of Secrets. "In many ways, it was the impetus. The fallout from that battle put the pieces into place that would eventually lead to our end."

Isii quieted, staring up at him. "Are you alright?"

He shifted his eyes away from the pair, drawn from his thoughts as he gave a short nod. "It is difficult to see my kin. In all my journeys through the Fade, I have avoided visions of them, for reasons I assume I do not need to explain."

She scanned the faces at the table, trying in vain to identify another of the Creators. "Who else is here?"

"June, your god of choice," he said dryly, pointing to a red-faced man who was draining his glass, his hand gripping the wrist of a slave who immediately went about refilling it once he'd finished. He released her, shooing her away with a brush of his hand, his eyelids heavy, his cheeks flushed from drink. He leaned over to speak to a woman who sat very stiffly, seemingly disinterested. She was beautiful yet had a dull look on her face, clearly bored. "I was never certain why Sylaise came to these revelries," Fen'Harel commented, gesturing to the woman. "She did not seem particularly interested in anything I had to offer. I assume she was only concerned with keeping her brother from making a fool of himself."

Isii glanced down the table, frowning. "What of their sister? Is Andruil here?"

The genuine roll of his laughter surprised her. "Absolutely not. She would not have come, even if she had been invited. It is likely that Mythal and Elgar'nann made a polite appearance earlier in the evening, but it appears that everyone is well enough into their cups that the pair would have long since departed."

The song drew to a close and the younger Fen'Harel approached with Ghilan'nain on his arm. He had a merry look on his face, flushed along his cheeks and ears, grinning as he guided the first halla to her seat before slumping into his own at the head of the table. The woman who was seated beside him perked up at his reappearance, leaning in close, whispering in his ear. Isii didn't need to hear the woman's words – her body language told her enough. She ran her fingers delicately along the chains against his chest, angling herself in a way that was clearly trying to be alluring. He seemed pleased by whatever he'd heard, drawing her chin up with his fingers, his face tucked down toward her throat as he murmured back to her. The woman arched her brow, biting her lip. Isii cleared her throat uncomfortably as she saw him nip at her earlobe, his hand slipping teasingly against her clothed thigh.

"Are you drunk?" Isii asked.

"Most certainly."

His younger self pulled away from the woman, reaching for his glass. As quickly as she had gained his attention, she lost it again as he addressed his kin.

"No taste for dancing tonight, I take it?" he said, his countenance portraying nothing but teasing amusement. "At this rate the lot of you will drain my wine cellars."

“It would be a pity for us to leave you in such dire need of resupply, lethallin,” Dirthamen said, smiling. “If you have need, you can always take from my vineyards – assuming, of course, you’re incapable of making up the difference yourself.”

Fen’Harel lifted his brow as he shrugged, finishing off his drink. “Believe me, it will be no trouble. I receive enough in tribute, my stores will be doubled by tomorrow.” The older Fen’Harel muttered something under his breath as his younger self raised his glass, gesturing to one of his servants.

“Ah, a moment, Wolf,” June said, snapping his fingers. The slave marked with his vallaslin quickly stepped forward, standing stiffly at his side, clutching a carafe. “Take of this instead. My offering for the evening.”

“Better do so quickly before he finishes it off,” Sylaise grumbled. Her brother did not seem to notice as he glanced up at the slave.

“Don’t just stand there, staring at me – go fill his glass, girl!” The slave nodded, jumping only slightly as the god clapped her across the backside, scooting her scurrying feet over toward the Dread Wolf. She kept her eyes down as she neared Fen’Harel, the Wolf not giving her a second glance as he kept his eyes on June, holding his glass up for her to refill. “A prized vintage, sweetened with the finest fruits of the northern coast,” the God of Craft continued.

Fen’Harel gave him a polite smile. “Showing off?”

June grinned. “What kind of guest would I be if I did not bring the best?”

The slave’s hands were shaking as she poured the drink, the Wolf only taking notice of her when the carafe tipped over, spilling into his lap. She gasped, quickly spitting out breathless apologies as he startled, frowning.

“Forgive me, my Lord god... it was an accident... I was careless. I shouldn’t have-”

He glanced up at the girl, taking a cloth to sop up the mess. “Calm yourself,” he said with a chuckle, “you did me no harm, da’len.”

“A good thing that you keep no slaves, if you would treat them so softly,” Falon’Din commented smugly. “They’d walk right over you within a matter of weeks.”

“Or perhaps he simply fancies that one, nas’falon. He does have such a weakness for a pretty face,” Dirthamen added, smirking. Fen’Harel gave him a subtle sneer, his lip curling back as a small tittering laughter rose around the table. Isii noticed the older Fen’Harel stiffen beside her, his eyes narrowing, fists clenching. Still, he said nothing.

June seemed particularly amused by the notion. “She’s yours for the evening if you want her,” he said with a twisted grin. “Consider it another gift for our gracious host. I assure you, she’s better with her hands when she’s not pouring wine.”

The laughter among the guests rose as Fen’Harel glanced up at the girl. “A tempting offer,” he murmured, grinning broadly.

“I remember this night now,” Fen’Harel muttered beside her. Isii glanced at him nervously before staring back at his younger self who was inspecting the slave. The girl looked horrified yet said nothing, keeping her eyes down. She wore the same vallaslin that Isii had chosen in her youth, red lines matching her hair as they dipped down into her lips, her skin pale and freckled. She was a wisp of a thing, small and thin-limbed. Though she was not an adolescent, she bore all the qualities of someone easily overpowered.

The Dread Wolf tipped her chin with his fingers until her eyes lifted to meet his. “What do you say, then, hmm? Will you be my companion for the evening?”

“I already said you could have her,” June said with a sharp laugh.

“Ignore him,” the Wolf said, keeping his eyes on the girl. There was a noticeable shift in the god as June’s smile lessened. “I want to hear your answer, pet.”

Her eyes darted from her master back to Fen’Harel before falling to the floor. “If that would please you, my Lord.”

Fen’Harel smiled broadly. “Very well.” He set down his glass, rising quickly from his seat. Her eyes widened, her fear unmistakable yet she said nothing as he took her by the hand, leading her from the table.

“A little overeager, are we?” June called out merrily. “We haven’t even finished dinner.”

Fen’Harel ignored the laughter that followed him as he led her away. Isii’s stomach churned, dreading the direction the memory was taking. She was relieved somewhat as it became clear that he had no intention of dragging her to his quarters, instead approaching the musicians. He barked an order to them and they halted their song, switching to a slower tune. Isii could see the awkward tension as other dancers cleared the way for him. The eyes that followed the Dread Wolf from the table watched with varying levels of discomfort or anger. Isii frowned, looking up at his older self for an explanation.

“Is there something here I’m not getting?” she asked quietly.

He let out a slow breath as his younger self bowed to the slave, the poor girl standing rigid, petrified. “I was being mocked. Everyone here knew that I did not keep slaves, nor did I take them to my bed. By offering her to me, June intended to humiliate me. Had I been drunk enough to accept, it would have shown all in attendance that I was no better than the rest of my kin. There were those who took my aversion as a sign that I saw myself as superior and many would relish the opportunity to have me prove otherwise. I should have simply refused, but I decided to be a provocative ass and throw the insult back into his face.”

Her eyes narrowed in confusion. “I don’t understand...”

He gestured toward the dancefloor as the Dread Wolf took the woman into his arms, slowly guiding her through steps that she clearly did not know. Her movements were stiff, her eyes quickly darting around the room as nervous laughter rose from some of the guests. “By accepting June’s offer and perverting it from its original intent, I was not only insulting a god but mocking the so-called generosity of an honored guest. I was treating his slave with the respect due a lover, a companion, rather than an object for my gratification. To dance with a god, to have one of the Creators show you any form of attention at all, was seen as a high honor. It was something these nobles strove for, fighting like dogs over any small scrap of our acknowledgement. To be selected by a god, in even some small way, placed you higher within their ranks. The nobles were obsessed with status. Elvhenan was a nation built on titles and strict class divisions. One did not dance with a slave. Why would you? A dance is either a celebration or an act of seduction and one need not seduce someone who is compelled to service you whether they want to or not.

“Look around the room,” he continued and Isii obeyed, glancing at the others who comprised his audience. “Any one of those nobles would do whatever it took to earn my favor. They would throw their daughters at my feet if they thought getting her into my bed would earn them my blessing. By dancing with this slave, I am telling each and every one of them that she is their equal, if not their



better, for I chose her over them.”

Isii watched as the girl stared up into the Dread Wolf’s face, her brow stitched with confusion and worry. He drew her close as part of the dance, his arm on the small of her back, his other hand guiding her own to his shoulder as he whispered something into her ear. Though tense, she visibly eased in his arms, nodding as he continued to guide her. He kept speaking to her, murmuring each time they drew close and soon there was the hint of a smile on her lips.

“Do you remember what you said to her?”

“I merely offered reassurances that I meant her no harm. I had a certain reputation that would make her question my intentions, with good reason.”

Isii’s eyes narrowed. “What kind of reputation?” Isii waited for an answer that would not come. “Fen’Harel,” she said firmly, a command hidden behind his name. He gave her a brief, chilled glance before returning his gaze to the dance.

“There were many who saw me as little more than a hedonist who held no interests beyond my own indulgences. I sought beauty and pleasure and cared little for anything outside of that. At times, this was a calculated performance on my part; another mask to hide behind to conceal my true motivations. Other times, the things said about me were well deserved.”

“So she feared you because you were some sort of lothario?”

The discomfort was clear on his face as he nodded. “There was a time when I was young and selfish. I took what I wanted because it was available to me, offered freely without hesitation. Anything I desired, with very few exceptions.”

“What sort of exceptions would there be for a god?”

He kept his eyes forward, his voice softening. “I wanted companionship. I took what I could get instead and I enjoyed it. But it did not lessen the desire to have something more than that. Of all the women I had, none were like you.”

Isii scoffed, regretting it as she saw the look on his face. He flinched as he turned his gaze toward her. “Do not mistake that for idle flattery, Inquisitor,” he said firmly. “How could I have possibly had with any of them what I had with you? They knew precisely who I was. They pursued me for my power, my position. They did not want *me*. They wanted what I could give them. I quickly learned not to mistake the two.” He looked back across the hall, his gaze growing distant as a quiet weight settled in the corners of his lips. “Perhaps a few of them truly loved me,” he murmured. “Yet every single one of them would have done whatever it took to make me believe the same was true for them.”

Even while hearing his words, she could not help but notice how his younger self smiled, how his eyes seemed to shine as he danced. He appeared happy and relaxed in a way that she rarely saw. He was pleased by his little game, enjoying the way June was scowling from behind his wineglass. The dance ended and he offered a deep, flourishing bow to his partner, thanking her for the honor. He took the girl’s hand and placed a gentle kiss to her inner wrist, barely hiding a deeply amused grin as the room rippled with shocked tittering. Something so small, so insignificant, yet these elves seemed scandalized.

She could tell he was having fun.

He took the girl’s arm, draped it delicately against his own and brought her back to the banquet

table. He lingered by the seat beside his own, still occupied by the woman he'd been so openly flirtatious with before. "Move," he ordered. The noblewoman froze, looking at him in shocked offense but he merely smiled, lifting his brows. "Do I need to repeat myself?"

The woman was clearly insulted as she stared at the slave but said nothing as she rose from her seat. Fen'Harel guided his new companion into the chair, smiling mischievously as tensions audibly rose among his guests. All eyes were on him as he slumped back into his seat, picking up his wineglass once more.

"I take it the seat beside yours was considered a place of honor?" Isii asked.

"Not only that, but it was an insult to everyone there to have a slave sit among them as an equal," Fen'Harel answered. His younger self made a show of his satisfaction as he finally tasted the wine.

"Delightful," he said in a purr, his eyes fixed on June. "A marvelous offering. Thank you. I will certainly savor it."

The meal resumed as it had before, though the conversations were stilted, all those in attendance clearly made uncomfortable by the fact that the Dread Wolf focused nearly all of his attention on his companion. He fed her delicacies, whispered in her ear things that had her covering her mouth to stifle laughter, blatantly disregarding his other guests as they tried to draw him back into their conversations. June was fuming, but Sylaise kept a firm grip on his sleeve, glaring at him. It was more than clear that he had gotten himself into this and the Wolf would only end it when he saw fit.

"I can't believe how bothered they are simply over you showing favor to a slave," Isii murmured.

"They were furious. No one would do anything about it, of course," Fen'Harel answered. "Who would speak out against me here? They were in my temple, my home. I could do as I pleased. I could have gotten away with far greater scandals during one of my revelries – and did, on previous occasions."

Isii raised her brow. "Do I want to know?"

His lips pursed, partway to a grin. "I will simply say that I was a very impulsive young man and not often one who favored discretion. There are far worse memories the Fade could have shown you."

Isii nodded toward the noblewoman he had ousted from the seat at his side who stood away from the table, glaring. "I take it she was a lover of yours?"

He shook his head. "No. Merely a social climber. She hoped I would name her as one of my Exalted and improve their family's standing."

"The two of you seemed fairly *friendly* before," Isii said pointedly.

"It does not mean I would call her my lover," Fen'Harel replied. "It was a game we both knew we were playing. She was not the first, nor was she the last to make such gestures in the pursuit of power."

Isii's attention was drawn once more to the slave, the young Wolf laughing as the girl blushed, hiding a grin. It was clear she found him charming. "Whatever happened to her?" she asked.

"By the end of the festivities, I sent the woman on her way, back to June." Isii looked up at him, frowning, but he shook his head. "It was unavoidable. I had to make it clear I was not keeping her for the evening. Otherwise, all would assume I was taking her to my bed."

“So you just toss her back into chains and be done with it?”

“I did not say that,” he replied calmly. “I gave a rather obscene amount of coin to a third party and had him buy her off of June the following day. I freed her as soon as she came under my protection. I am uncertain what became of her after that. Probably served at one of my temples. In all honesty, I doubt we even interacted more than once after this night. But I would not have her suffer the consequences of my actions. I used her to insult her master. I would not let her bear the brunt of his retaliation.”

As she watched his younger self, Isii could not help but take note of how easily he'd put the girl at ease. In only a few short moments he had taken a woman who was too terrified to properly pour him a glass of wine and gotten her to sit comfortably at his side, smiling warmly, not shying away as he gently covered her hand with his own. It was a manipulation to antagonize June, yet it was a kindness nonetheless as his thumb drew slow circles against her skin.

Isii startled slightly, pulled from her thoughts as the Dread Wolf touched her shoulder. “We have lingered here long enough, Inquisitor. We should wake now if we intend to return to Skyhold before sunrise.”

She took one last long look across the hall before slowly nodding. “I suppose you’re right.” Her gaze settled on the young Wolf once more and for a brief moment his eyes lifted. She knew he was not looking at her. She knew it was mere coincidence and yet it did not keep her heart from stopping as he glanced in her direction. He smiled, his piercing blue eyes serving as the last thing she saw before her own eyes flew open.

Isii was aware of warmth, the sound of his heartbeat, the subtle swaying of his chest as he breathed. She'd rolled toward Fen'Harel in her sleep, curling her body against the Dread Wolf's side, her head tucked down. One of his arms was draped across her back, his fingers curling around her shoulder. It was a familiar feeling, waking up this way. Intentional or not, there were many mornings spent in shared tents where she woke up in his embrace. She froze, her eyes wide and yet she did not lift her head. She couldn't see his face but his body remained still, his breaths slow and relaxed. *Is he still asleep?* Isii knew she should pull away but she hesitated, allowing her eyes to close again, listening to his heartbeat. As much as she hated to admit it, she missed this feeling. It had been nearly two months since she learned the truth; two months of hardly being touched by anyone. She missed having someone to press herself to, to curl up against and feel safe with. She didn't feel safe here, but the familiarity soothed her somewhat.

How cruel it was to miss something that was never real. His feelings were genuine, yes, but everything about him was built on a lie. Part of her wished she could simply forget who he was and go back to believing that he was Solas. She would be happier that way, wouldn't she? It would be easier to embrace the trick rather than the truth.

She was startled when she felt his hand gently squeeze her shoulder. He murmured her name and it was clear from his tone that he hadn't just woken. She lifted her head, looking down at him, her hand pressed to his chest. The moonlight was soft on his features, the blue-white hue making his eyes seem so bright in the dim light. *It would be so much easier to simply forget...*

Isii pulled away from him stiffly, lowering her gaze as she scooted across to the edge of the bed. She sat there for a moment, straightening her nightclothes and tightening her robe. They were back into waking, back into reality, a room of cracked glass and dust and the remnants of a life abandoned and forgotten to time. She glanced out through the wall once more, out across the endless sea of trees that had grown over the grave of Arlathan.

“This place seems so much colder than it was back then,” she muttered quietly. “It was beautiful,

once. It seems a shame to see it like this now.”

“I would not mourn the loss of it,” he said softly, though his tone did not seem to support his dismissal. “It was inevitable that one day it would fall to ruin. Very few things last forever.”

She kept her eyes down, listening as he rose from the bed. He gathered the books he’d set aside. She glanced up only when he moved back toward her, his hand extended. “Come,” he coaxed her, “it will be daylight soon.”

She nodded before wordlessly slipping her hand into his.

She was ready to go home.

## Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Falon – friend

Felas - slow

Ma fen – my wolf

Lethallin – kin

Nas’falon – soul mate (not necessarily romantic, but denotes two beings who essentially share one soul)

The robes Isii wore in the Fade are a reference to [A Little Piece of Elvhenan](#).

If you're interested in the way I write the gods in this scene, I'd recommend checking out [Var Hellathen](#) which is my Dragon Age Big Bang fic about the months leading up to the Great Betrayal.

## Chapter 10

### Chapter Notes

Parts of this chapter are NSFW.

So yeah. There's that.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Hello again, pet.”

The sound of Fen'Harel's voice made Isii's chest tighten, nearly jumping out of her skin as she quickly sat up, clutching her bedsheets to her chest. She scanned the darkness of her quarters, finding the outline of his figure seated at her desk. She could see little of him other than the faint gleam of his eyes reflecting the small amount of light in the room.

“I told you not to come in here,” she said.

He chuckled – a low, rumbling, almost purring sound. “Is that so?”

Isii frowned, lighting her fireplace with a gesture. The shadows melted from his form and she stilled, startled. It wasn't the Dread Wolf. Not *her* Dread Wolf. He appeared as he had in the memory, a dark haired youth who lounged in her chair, his feet propped up on her desk. He grinned at her confusion, his hands neatly folded against his stomach. “Expecting someone else?” he asked, his brow arched.

She lowered her gaze to her bed, slowly piecing together her recollection. The last thing she could remember was settling down to sleep in her tent. She wasn't even at Skyhold, let alone in her quarters. “I'm dreaming,” she muttered.

“I would hope so,” the Dread Wolf said with a laugh. “Otherwise this would make for a rather confusing predicament.”

She lifted her eyes again, staring at him. “You're not real.”

He shrugged. “Debatable.” He lowered his feet, slowly rising. “Am I merely a figment of your imagination? Some voice for your subconscious?” he asked, slowly pacing toward her. “Or perhaps the Fade has pieced together fragments of dusty old memories for your enjoyment? Maybe a bit of both?” He smiled, his eyes locked on her as he leaned in close, his hands resting on the mattress. “The Fade is so delightfully confusing in that way. No matter the source, the result is the same. I exist here because you want me to.” He reached forward, brushing his fingers along her cheek, lightly raking his nails against her before his touch settled below her chin. “The question is - why?”

She looked up into his face, her breaths quickening. “It's just a dream. It doesn't mean anything.”

His smile deepened. “We both know that's not true,” he murmured. There was something wild in his eyes that made her stomach flutter. *No. Not wild.* There was nothing *wild* about him, for he appeared to have the same unwavering sense of control as the man she knew. Yet all the quiet confidence of Fen'Harel as an older man came across as cocky and self-assured on his younger

features- as if he knew he could have whatever he wanted from her. He held her chin up, leaning down until his face nearly met her own. She could barely breathe, her body rigid as his eyes lowered to her lips. “Perhaps you think I’ll give you what you don’t want to ask for?”

He held her in place with little more than his fingertips as he closed the distance between them. Even so, she felt incapable of pulling away. His kiss was slow. Sensual. The heat of his tongue pressed between her lips, travelling across her body like a trembling wave as he tasted her. She whimpered softly as he pulled away, nuzzling her cheek.

“Is that why you brought me here, pet?” He tilted her head back with the press of his fingers, his kisses trailing down her throat. Her eyes fluttered closed, lips parted as she tried to quiet the audible tremor in her breaths. “You spent *months* begging the Dread Wolf to take you...” He paused to chuckle. “Irony, in a way.” He bit her neck and she gasped, gripping his shoulder as he braced his knee against the bed. His arm slipped around her waist and he pulled her closer, scooting her to the edge, turning her to face him completely. She muffled her surprise against his skin, tucking her face against his throat. “Even after learning the truth – that desire didn’t change, did it?”

His mouth grazed her ear, followed by his tongue tracing along its length. Isii bit her lip. “No matter how many times you tell yourself you shouldn’t, you still want your lover back,” he whispered. “You expected to find some sort of monster in the Fade, didn’t you? You thought the memories of Elvhenan would show you the beast you’ve always trembled at the thought of, but instead you found me.” He looked into her face, smirking. “Now you’re trembling for an altogether different reason, aren’t you, Inquisitor?”

When he caught her lips again there was laughter behind his kiss, his hands caressing her as she surrendered to it. This was what she wanted. This was everything she wanted, everything she had been missing. When he broke the kiss she chased after his lips, trying to capture them again. “You witnessed the Dread Wolf in his prime and you *liked* what you saw. Not quite as evil as you always assumed, am I?”

She gazed up at him. Her heart was racing, her senses heightened by just how close he was. He was leaning against the bed, his arm around the small of her back, poised as if ready to push her down, to cover her body with his own and yet he waited, watching her. Tentatively, she reached up to run her hand along his cheek. He smiled, his look strangely tender as he turned his head into her touch, pressing his lips to her palm. “You’re not at all what I thought you would be,” she whispered.

His grin broadened, his hand slipping to the nape of her neck. He leaned forward, nuzzling her jaw aside to give him access to her throat once more. “Then there is really only one question remaining,” he murmured, sucking softly on her skin, his fingers working themselves into her hair. The feeling made her back arch, his name coming softly from her lips. “If you want me...” He nipped and she gasped. “... and you no longer fear me...” When he pulled away the face that met her own was Solas, *her* Fen’Harel, the older man whose eyes were kind, who looked at her as if she was the most precious thing in the world. “... then what’s holding you back?”

She studied his features before gripping his robes, pulling him into a kiss. There was a fierce hunger in the way her lips met his, in the way she pulled him with her as she laid back against the bed. It was thrilling. Freeing. She felt as if she could finally breathe again, a tense weight lifting from her, quickly replaced by the weight of his body against her own. She broke for air and his lips brushed her ear, whispering softly. “Isalan tua rosas’da’din.” The words moved through her, caressing her, making her body flood with heat. She whimpered as he nipped her earlobe. “Sathan, vhenan,” he said, words coated in heavy breaths as his hands slid along her sides, pushing her nightclothes up. “Lasa em.”

His lips trailed along her neck, her chest, her stomach. Kissing. Licking. Biting. Her breaths caught, her back arching to meet his touch, lifting her hips as he slipped his fingers into her smalls. He pulled them down slowly, the drag of fabric along her thighs making her moan. He murmured her name against her skin, the heat of his breath making her shudder as he parted her legs, lips and fingertips slowly inching closer to where she desperately wanted to be touched.

It had been too long since anyone had pleased her. Far too long. She needed this. She needed this to be with him. She let her eyes close, her head falling back, barely noticing as his voice seemed to shift, louder, more insistent. She could feel the Fade wavering.

“Isii.”

Her eyes opened with a start and she froze, taking a second to get her bearings. The inside of her tent was brightly lit, her body suddenly aware of the unforgiving ground and the thinness of her bedroll. “*Oh for fuck’s sake,*” she hissed under her breath. She groaned, rolling over stiffly as she rubbed a hand over her face. “You’d better have a damn good reason for waking me up,” she grumbled.

“Ah, you *are* alive,” Dorian chimed from beyond the tent flap. “I was starting to have my doubts. The Commander seems to be itching to break camp soon, so it’s best you ready yourself. There’s breakfast if you want it.”

She let out a slow, tight sigh. “Alright. Message received.” She heard his boots scraping in the dirt as he stepped away. She lay there for a time, staring at the draped canvas above her, thinking. She used to have dreams like that about him all the time. It was nothing new – though admittedly she hadn’t had one quite like that since she learned who he really was. When Fen’Harel showed up in her dreams, when he touched her and kissed her she was always frightened, always trying to pull away. This time was different. It was more like the dreams she had when he was still Solas.

She took a deep breath. *It doesn’t really mean much,* she told herself, *other than I have gone far too long without sex.* Even before she left for the Conclave, it had been quite some time since she’d been intimate with anyone. Despite her efforts, *Solas* had gone no further than passionate kisses and the occasional wandering hand. She could be thankful for that, in retrospect. His reluctance made more sense now that she knew the truth.

She sat up, stripping off her nightclothes as Dorian’s voice rose in the distance.

“You are looking rather haggard this morning. Not much experience with field work, I take it?”

She heard Cullen groan quietly in response. “Dorian-”

“What? Merely pointing out that some of us seem less capable of maintaining appearances whilst roughing it in the wilderness. I’m beginning to think you got that scar from some halfhearted attempt at shaving.”

“There are more important things to focus on.”

“Oh, yes. Certainly. That goes without saying.” Dorian was quiet for a moment as Isii stooped over to pull her breeches on. “Still... your hair. That’s not an intentional thing, is it?”

“Is he always like this?”

“Yes,” she heard Fen’Harel mutter quietly. “Though if you choose not to engage him, he tires of listening to himself speak eventually.”

“Oh, charming as ever, Solas.”

“I do what I can.”

Isii pulled her tunic into place, stifling a yawn as she shuffled out of her tent. The air was chilly and damp, her arms instinctively wrapping around herself as she moved closer to their campfire. The scent of their meal hit her nose and she frowned, peering at it. “Where’d we get fresh meat?”

“Something Solas dragged back to camp,” Dorian said before peering at Fen’Harel. “Odd in itself. You must have been up at some ungodly hour.”

The Dread Wolf did not glance up from the book he had spread across his lap. “I had difficulty sleeping.”

“That must be a real bother for a somniari,” Dorian said with a chuckle. Fen’Harel merely hummed distractedly.

“I was getting really sick of boiled oats and dried fruit anyway.” Isii said, glancing over towards Cullen as she served herself. The Commander did look a little disheveled as he frowned, his eyes narrowing as he inspected the map he had laid out in front of him. His stubble was more noticeable than usual, the natural curl of his hair more pronounced and unruly. It was odd to see him outside of Skyhold, though his company was not unwelcome. She settled next to him before starting to eat. “How much further?”

He straightened his posture, his elbows resting on his knees. “There is a region just south of Samson’s stronghold that our scouts identified as a good campsite,” he said, pointing out the location for her. “Far enough to go unnoticed. High ground will give us a visual advantage. On mount, we should reach it by nightfall. We’ll be able to rest some and move in at dawn. With any luck, we’ll catch him and his men off-guard.”

“Good,” she said with a nod. “Once I’m done eating, we’ll start breaking camp. I’ll feel a lot better once we get Samson into our custody.”

“Agreed,” Cullen said softly.

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Isii huddled over the small board, trying to hold it steady against her legs as she wrote. The ink didn’t move smoothly across the page, but it didn’t matter. She planned to rewrite it when she got back to Skyhold so the penmanship would be a bit more legible before she sent it off to the Free Marches. She had a few hours before they would move into the Shrine of Dumat and she knew that sleep was unlikely.

Besides, this was a letter she should have written weeks ago.

*En’an’sal’en, Keeper.*

*It has been too long.*

*The Inquisition continues to make strides. You have done much to prepare me for this role, despite neither one of us anticipating it. The shems benefit from having a First as their leader. I hope that one day you can make the journey to Skyhold. We have made a good home for ourselves (though I will never truly adjust to the cold).*



*There is so much I wish to tell you, so much I have learned – about the People, our history, our language, our faith. I have faced truths that challenge everything you taught me to believe. It's too much to put into a letter. It is news better served by a face-to-face discussion.*

Isii paused, a small pit forming in her stomach as she imagined Deshanna's expression when she finally saw her face again. Would she accept her without her vallaslin? Would she understand why she chose to remove it?

*Much has changed. I have changed – so much so that I fear it's not possible for me to return to the life I had before. Do not take that as a sign of relinquishment. I have no intention of abandoning Lavellan. You are my blood as I am yours and nothing will ever change that. I miss you all terribly – more than words can say. And if I am to be truly honest, the idea that this experience has changed me so completely is in many ways frightening. It goes beyond a mere crisis of faith, beyond unconventional thought. It stretches well outside the bounds of any of the rebellious behavior I infuriated you with in my youth.*

*I fear whether you could still accept me if you knew the truth about me.*

*If you knew who he was, what he has been to me, would you hate me for it? Would you still claim that my sin is what drew him to my side? Perhaps you would pity me- a tainted child who let herself be tricked so easily. I was too trusting, you would say. I was everything a Keeper should not be. Not only did I let the Dread Wolf into my heart, but I welcomed him there with open arms. Would you still embrace me as a daughter if you knew what I've done, what I fear I may do again?*

Isii stared at the page, wiping roughly at her cheek before crossing out the latter half of the letter. She couldn't send that. Maybe one day she could confess that part of her life to Deshanna, but not now. Not like this. She began to write again, picking up earlier in the letter.

*You are my blood as I am yours and nothing will ever change that. I miss you all terribly – more than words can say. You above all others, hahren. Being away for this long has put many things into a new perspective for me. I realize now that I was not always fair to you. I tried to push you away, to punish you for trying to replace what you never could. I know you were only doing what was best for me and I know every harsh lesson you taught came from a place of love. You have helped shape the woman I am today.*

*I miss you dearly, Mamae in ma lath'in. I do not use those words lightly, but that is what you are to me and what you have been since I had need of it. I never thanked you the way that I should have. I have been ungrateful for the gifts you have given me.*

*I only hope that I can continue to make you proud.*

*Sule sal harthir.*

*Mar asha'lan,*

*Isii*

## Chapter End Notes

### Translations:

Isalan tua rosas'da'din – I want to make you come

Sathan, vhenan. Lasa em. – Please, lover. Let me.

En'an'sal'en - blessings

Mamae in ma lath'in – mother in my heart. Deshanna is not her biological mother, but she has raised Isii for most of her life.

Sule sal harthir – until we hear from each other again

Mar asha'lan – your daughter

So I might have let myself get a bit carried away with that dream (as it ended up going places I didn't originally intend), but dammit I'm sticking with it. I needed a breather from angst.

As is almost always the case, the Elvish used is credited to fenxshiral's Project Elvhen.

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“This is it,” Cullen murmured quietly. “The heart of Samson’s command.”

Even in a hushed whisper, the Commander’s voice sounded out of place in the eerie silence. Templar banners fluttered in the breeze, the wind carrying smoke and ash across the courtyard of the ancient Temple of Dumat. Birds chirped in the distance, called forth by the early morning light, but there were no other signs of life. Isii’s eyes scanned the headquarters warily, cautious as she led their approach. “I don’t see him anywhere,” she said, keeping her voice low, “or hear him.”

“Nor I.” A familiar crease dug into Cullen’s brow as he let out a small huff. “Maker, tell me he hasn’t fled.”

The sudden pulse of a barrier slipping over her skin startled her. Isii could see the Commander flinching as the wave coursed over him as well, yet he made no objection. She glanced over her shoulder. Fen’Harel was already gripping his staff, his shoulders lowering defensively. “We are not alone,” he said simply.

“Harthas sulrahn?” His eyes met hers and he nodded his confirmation. He’d heard something up ahead.

Her companions followed as she quickened her steps, her staff raised. It didn’t take long to spot the Templars who awaited them, their bodies corrupted by red lyrium to the point where they no longer resembled men. Isii scanned the field. Two ahead. One on each side beyond matching flights of steps.

“Solas. Dorian. Take left,” she ordered, tugging sharply on the Veil, lightning coursing over the end of her weapon. “Cullen, you’re with me.” She broke into a run, hearing the clamor of the Commander’s armor as he kept pace, unsheathing his sword.

“I have your back, Inquisitor.”

She flashed a teasing smile over her shoulder. “Let’s see if you can keep up with me first.”

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Inside the temple the air was thick with smoke, the heat of the flames causing sweat to pour down her face as she strained to pull as much energy as she could from the Fade. Isii’s mana was waning but she couldn’t stop now. There were too many of them and her team was outnumbered. The Templar guardsmen seemed to appear and disappear at will, fading in and out of the smoke like ghosts, their bodies twisted and monstrous. She spun, slamming her staff down in a wide arc, a blast of lightning cracking out like a whip. She hit her target but only barely; a grazing shot that left him briefly stunned. Cullen took the advantage, bashing the Templar with his shield, grunting as he knocked him off of his feet. Isii was breathing hard, her lungs burning from the dry air.

Samson had known they were coming. Somehow, he knew.

This was a trap.

“Dorian!” she choked out. “Let’s make ourselves some backup!”

The man stole a quick glance over to her and even through his exhaustion he flashed a smile. The pair began to cast, a haze of purple light slithering out like tendrils of smoke, each enveloping one of the fallen corpses that littered the hall. Watching their mangled bodies twitch back into life was enough to make her stomach turn, but she'd do what she must to even the odds. The spirits she summoned moved clumsily in their vessel, lurching like a fleshy puppet before gaining their footing, lunging at the nearest corrupted Templar. It would not win them the fight, but hopefully it was enough for them to gain some momentum.

She sensed something moving on her left, turning only in time to see one of the mutated soldiers barreling down on her. She stumbled backward, barely pushing her body out of the way as his sword cut wildly through the air, striking the stone with a reverberating *clang*. Had it made contact, it would have nearly cleaved her in half. Her heart raced as she brandished her staff, beginning to summon, but he was too quick. He recovered, countered his failed strike and swung at her again. Reflexively she lowered her weapon, blocking the blow, unable to move fast enough to make any other choice. Her staff let out a sickening crack, misfiring magical energy as the sword sliced it in two, shredding the wood on impact. She winced from the blinding wave of energy, staggering back, cursing as the top half of her weapon clattered to the floor.

"Isii!"

Fen'Harel's voice was distant, far from her thoughts as panic set in. She threw herself out of the way of another swing, flipping the broken end of her staff in her hand, bearing the bladed tip like a shortened spear. She lunged forward, snarling, trying to drive the end into a gap in his armor but he caught her arm, jerking it roughly. She nearly screamed as the sharp twist sent jolts of pain shooting up into her shoulder, unable to stop her momentum as he threw her to the ground. She hit the stone floor hard, gritting her teeth as the impact rang through her. She could see the Templar advancing on her, poised to strike as she scrambled backward along the ground.

"Stay down!"

She barely had time to process his command before she heard the Dread Wolf snarling in exertion, a sudden explosion pushing outward from where he stood. The room burst into chaos. Debris flew outward, crates shattering as they hit the stone walls, their enemies thrown as if caught by an unrelenting wave of force. Isii felt it wash over her painlessly, the immensity of such raw power stealing her breath away. She could see Dorian stagger when it struck him, leaning on his staff to keep his footing and even with his lingering magical immunities, Cullen had to brace himself. The corrupted Templar who'd stood over her fell to the ground in a clattering heap, his sword thrown from his grasp.

Isii didn't hesitate. She tightened her grip on the end of her staff, pushing up onto her knees before throwing herself over his body. She sat atop the Templar, driving the bladed tip beneath the edge of his helmet, sinking it into his throat with as much force as she could muster. He gurgled, his body jerking wildly before falling still. Isii could hear the fighting resume around her. Panting, she pushed herself to her feet in time to see Cullen cut down the Templar before him as the pair of puppeted corpses unleashed their fury on their fallen brethren. The Dread Wolf had not slowed after his attack, easily executing the few that remained in his path and soon the hall fell still.

Isii struggled to catch her breath as she released the spirits, the corpse she weaponized falling lifeless once more. "Vishante kaffas, Solas!" Dorian cursed sharply as he followed suit, his own thrall collapsing. "What in the Void was that?"

"There is much to be learned in the Fade, many methods lost to the ages," Fen'Harel said dismissively, his attention on Isii as he approached. "I always strive to keep expanding my

techniques whenever possible.” The lie was a weak one. Isii was certain the Dread Wolf knew that. Dorian was not a fool. There was a very good chance he’d recognize that there was something unusual about his magic. *Solas* shouldn’t have been capable of unleashing that much power. Even though Cullen made no comment, his years of experience with mages should have given him enough reason to be suspicious.

Isii retrieved a vial of lyrium from her belt as Fen’Harel stopped a few strides from her. “Are you alright, Inquisitor?”

She rolled her shoulder stiffly but nodded. “I’ll be fine.” She eyed Dorian a moment before fixing her gaze on the Dread Wolf. “*That was risky*,” she hissed in Elvish. She could tell her meaning was understood.

Fen’Harel’s face remained unmoved. “*I am well-aware*,” he murmured, responding in kind so that she would be the only one to understand him. “*It was a calculated choice*.”

“Well,” Dorian started again, sliding his staff onto his back, “unless you think you have another one of those in you, let’s hope we don’t run into any more of them.”

Isii worked the cork out of the vial with her thumb, a well-practiced motion by now, before tipping the lyrium onto her tongue. She took a breath, shuddering at the sudden rush. Cullen watched her intently, his eyes quickly darting away as they met her own. The furrow in his brow deepened. She felt a sudden pang of guilt for using the potion in his presence, but she had little choice. If Samson left any more surprises for them, she had to be ready.

She finally had a moment to examine the hall more closely, taking in the damage done to it. It was clear the fires had been set intentionally. “This place is already half-destroyed,” she muttered.

“Samson must have ordered his Templars to sack his headquarters so we couldn’t,” Cullen replied. His irritation was clear.

“With this kind of welcome, he had to have known we were coming,” Dorian said. “Do you think we were spotted making camp last night?”

“Or one of our own told him of our intentions,” Fen’Harel added coolly. Isii shot him a wary look but he simply shrugged. “It is always a possibility, Inquisitor. Trust should not come too easily.”

“I fear you may be right,” Cullen muttered, “though I hope this was not an intentional betrayal. Either way, we’ve dealt Samson a blow. We can take comfort in that, at least.”

“We should still take a look around,” Isii offered. “Maybe we’ll get lucky and they left something useful behind.”

“All I see is smoke and ash,” Cullen grimaced. “If this is Samson’s idea of remaking the world, I prefer yours.”

Isii collected the broken piece of her staff, giving him a wry smile. “I’d certainly hope so. I’d hate to see you switch sides on me.”

There was very little that wasn’t scorched by the blaze. Isii could see bits of burned parchment scattered along the blackened piles of ash, scraps of incomplete maps, indecipherable writing. They’d probably contained information on their troop movements that would have proven useful. A glimmer of light caught her eye and she stooped down, picking up an empty glass vial.

“A lyrium bottle.”

“More over here too,” Dorian mused. “Licked clean, by the looks of it.”

“How much lyrium is Samson taking?” Cullen asked, frowning. “His resistance must be extraordinary.”

“Troubling, considering it does not take much to corrupt the body,” Fen’Harel observed. “Even a small dose can kill or drive one into madness. Perhaps years of lyrium consumption prepared him for such resistance. Is that not why Corypheus found the Templars so tempting as a force to use for his own ends?”

“One more thing to thank the Order for, then,” Dorian muttered, glancing at the jumbled contents of a nearby table. Cullen’s expression darkened, yet he remained silent. The mage’s head tilted as he picked up a slip of folded paper, frowning as he read. “There appears to be something here for you, Commander.”

Cullen approached as the Tevinter handed him the letter. He broke the seal, his jaw tight as he began to scan its contents.

“What does it say?” Isii pried.

*“Drink enough lyrium and its song reveals the truth,”* he read, half-mumbling through his irritation. *“The Chantry used us. You’re good at following orders, Rutherford. It’s all you know how to do. It’s all any of us knew how to do. That’s all the Chantry wanted from us. Good little soldiers to keep in line while they kept pouring lyrium down our throats- but only just enough to tie us to their leash. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Can’t you see? You’ve merely traded masters.”* He glanced briefly toward the Inquisitor, clearly agitated as he continued. *“You’re fighting the wrong battle. Following orders mindlessly because that’s all you’ve been taught to do. Corypheus chose me as his general and his vessel of power... and other such nonsense,”* he snapped, crumpling the letter. “Does he think I’ll understand? What does he know?”

Isii’s attention was drawn from the Commander when she saw the Dread Wolf grow still. His head lifted slightly, eyes narrowing as he studied the large set of heavy double doors at the end of the room. “What is it?”

*“More movement up ahead,”* he muttered in Elvish. *“Quiet, though. Not likely to be another onslaught.”*

“I don’t think I like how the two of you keep slipping out of Common,” Dorian said pointedly. “Something you care to share with the rest of the class, Solas?”

“Merely a suggestion that we press forward with caution,” he replied. “We should not linger too comfortably until we know the rooms beyond are secure.”

“Agreed,” Isii said, turning toward the doors. The Dread Wolf matched her brisk stride as she led them forward.

“You are without a weapon,” he said. “You should fall back.”

“Your concern is noted,” she replied flatly as she pushed her way past the entrance.

The room beyond was bathed in red light. She could practically taste the corruption in the air, a thick iron-like sharpness settling on her tongue with each breath. Shards of lyrium cut through the stone walls, forcing the floor to crack and give way to its growth. Flames danced along the crystal’s reflection, lining piles of burning rubble. The heat of the room was just as oppressive as the last and she found her lungs begging for the coolness of fresh air.

At first glance, the room was empty. It wasn't until they moved further into the hall that she spotted the figure slumped to the ground. His arm was slung across his stomach, his fist gripping his robes. His eyes calmly lifted as he heard their approach, the light catching the sunburst scar on his brow. His skin was startlingly pale and damp with sweat.

"Hello Knight-Captain Cullen," he greeted, his affectation eerily flat. "I see you have brought the Inquisitor. I expected as much."

Isii peered at him. "You know who I am?"

"Samson spoke of you," he said calmly. "He was troubled by your pursuit."

"It's Maddox, Samson's Tranquil." Cullen neared, his concern clearly written across his features as he studied the mage. "Are you hurt?"

"Yes."

"Solas-" Fen'Harel was moving even before Isii bid him, crouching down in front of the Tranquil. He lifted his hand, a soft glow starting to form on his fingertips.

"Do not misunderstand me," Maddox began. "That was not a request for aid. I drank my entire supply of Blightcap Essence."

The Dread Wolf paused, peering at him. "How much?" he asked softly.

"Enough," Maddox replied with a nod. "It will not be long now."

Fen'Harel lowered his hand, glancing back towards Isii. He gave a small shake of his head. There was nothing he could do.

Isii's stomach tightened. "You would have been safe with us, Maddox. We only wanted to ask you a few questions-"

"Yes." His voice was noticeably weaker. He swallowed, beginning again. "That is what I could not allow. I destroyed the camp with fire." His gaze shifted to the room as it burned around him. Isii wanted to say there was regret in his eyes, but she knew that wasn't possible. His face was blank. Emotionless. "We all agreed it was best. Our deaths ensured Samson had time to escape."

"You threw your lives away?" Cullen exclaimed in disbelief. "*For Samson? Why?*"

Maddox's eyes were sluggish as they returned to the Commander, his breathing shallower.

"Samson saved me even before he needed me. He gave me purpose again." He gulped softly for air, the muscles in his face slackening. "He was my friend," he added weakly, his voice falling into a dull whisper. His gaze grew distant even as his eyes remained fixed on Cullen. "He made me remember the birds," he rasped. His lids grew heavy, his body shuddering slightly. "I... wanted to help..." A heavy weight settled over his features like a sigh and his head fell back, his body slumping as the last of his strength gave way.

With that, he was dead.

Silence fell over the four of them. Eventually the Dread Wolf lifted his hand, closing the Tranquil's eyes. "Ela na venas atisha in i've'an," he murmured quietly. "Venas in mar erala sal." *May you find peace in the Beyond. Walk in your dreams once more.*

Isii couldn't stop staring at the dead man's brand, her throat feeling tight. Was this all there was for

him? Suicide for the sake of protecting a madman's general? He wanted to help, but Tranquil were not supposed to *want* anything. He'd had that stolen from him long ago, been turned into this shadow of a man, all over some love letters to his sweetheart.

She didn't know him, but she knew he deserved better than that.

"Ea son?" The sound of the Dread Wolf's voice made her lift her gaze. He stared back at her, concerned. She tried to lighten her expression, shaking her head.

*"I can't help but think..."* she began in Elvish, struggling to find the words. *"Would I have done the same, if the Templars had taken me? If you hadn't... If they had made me Tranquil? Would I kill myself without a second thought because they told me it was what I should do?"*

His eyes were unwavering, resolved as he spoke. *"I won't ever let that happen."*

She studied him for a moment before glancing over to Cullen. Her Commander watched them, clearly concerned and unable to understand their exchange. She cleared her throat, taking a breath. "Search the room," she ordered quietly. "Maddox may have missed something."

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She found Cullen on the outskirts of their camp, kneeling, his head lowered in prayer. He'd shed his armor as most of them had, desperate to seek some relief from the temple's stifling heat. His tunic was stained, soaked through, and Isii could see a distinct tremor in his shoulders as she approached.

"These truths the Maker has revealed to me," he murmured quietly, "as there is but one world, one life, one death, there is but one god and He is our Maker. They were sinners, who have given their love to false gods--"

Isii cleared her throat awkwardly. Cullen stilled, lifting his head to meet her gaze.

"Sorry for interrupting," she said. "Would you rather we speak later?"

"No," he said haltingly, shaking his head. "It's alright."

Despite his objections, he appeared drained as she knelt down next to him. "What's our status?"

"Secondary forces have taken the temple. The red lyrium deposits are being destroyed. We've cut the red Templars down to the core. It's a pity Maddox thought his sacrifice was the only answer."

"Do you know if he had any family to speak of?" Cullen lowered his eyes, considering for a moment before shaking his head.

"I am certain he does, but I was never aware of the details of his life before the Gallows."

Isii let out a resigned sigh. "Then the Inquisition will give him a proper funeral."

He nodded. "I will see it done. Still, we've made great strides this day. Samson has a severely curtailed army and enchanted armor that he can't maintain. You did it," he added with a small grin.

"I couldn't have done it without you." His smile broadened, yet it was still weak. He looked underslept, ragged and worn. Isii glanced down and noticed his hands were subtly shaking and she reached out, giving one of them a gentle squeeze to steady him. "How are you holding up?"

"The withdrawal is..." He hesitated, shaking his head. "I am not feeling my best at the moment,



but it will pass,” he said flatly. “I will be fit for our journey back to Skyhold. We do not need to delay on my account.”

“Don’t worry about that.” She summoned a subtle wave of frost into her fingertips, wiping sweat back from his brow. He closed his eyes, letting out a small, relieved sigh. “You know,” she added with a grin, “I could get used to having you watch my back.”

He chuckled softly. “I doubt I’d be able to properly oversee our troops if I traveled as much as you do. Still, I wanted to make an exception in this case.”

“Because of Samson?”

“And because of you.” He hesitated, his eyes opening as he considered his words. “I would not want you facing him alone, if given the option,” he said cautiously. “I’d sleep better knowing I was there at your side.”

Isii’s smile warmed before she turned her head, suddenly aware of the sound of someone’s approach. Fen’Harel stood calmly at a respectful distance, his hands tucked behind his back. “Apologies for the interruption,” he said quietly as she met his gaze. “I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time, Inquisitor. In private.”

“Of course.” She lowered her hand from Cullen’s brow, her eyes returning to him. “We’ll talk more later. Get some rest.” Cullen nodded as she pushed herself to her feet.

She walked with Fen’Harel in silence for a time. His face showed nothing in terms of his intent, though she’d grown used to that by now. He led her further from camp until the trees obscured them from view. Still, he said nothing. “What’s this about?” she finally asked.

Fen’Harel merely glanced at her before producing Dirthamen’s artifact from behind his back. She eyed it curiously. “You brought it with you?”

“I thought it best not to leave an ancient object of power out of my sight,” the Dread Wolf said. “It is a habit I am trying to break myself of,” he added dryly. She couldn’t help but chuckle. His eyes lowered to the stone, his fingers working over the etched pattern in its surface. “This day has demonstrated that Corypheus remains a few steps ahead of us. The sooner I can use this to our advantage, the better.” His eyes lifted, his brow creasing. “I believe I have discovered the problem and can now use it as intended. I need to test that theory, if you will allow me.”

Isii watched him for a moment before nodding. He raised the stone in his palm. “As last time – I will seek the details of your most recent meeting with your advisers. Do your best to block me, if you can.”

It was with no small amount of apprehension that she lifted her hand, reaching tentatively for the artifact. The past two encounters with the object had left her feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. Still, she knew this was necessary. The moment her fingers slid over the stone, the world went blank as if she was suddenly blinked out of existence. She saw nothing. Felt nothing. She could not even sense the weight of her own body standing on her feet. For a moment, she feared she was falling and yet the ground never rose to meet her. She simply was; existing in some suspended state, untethered and floating. The sensation made her stomach churn, dizzy and disoriented. There was an aching buzzing in her ears, her head ringing. Slowly, the hum gradually shifted, gaining a muffled clarity. It began to take the shape of a voice, low and resonant, though the words were completely outside of her comprehension. She couldn’t feel her body and yet she felt the press of something warm to her cheek. Gradually, as if being drawn from sleep, her awareness returned to her. The voice lifted and soon she could recognize the sound of the Dread

Wolf's voice quietly repeating her name.

Isii's eyes opened and a wave of dizziness struck her. She tried to blink back the strange sensation of suddenly being anchored in her body once more. His hand was to her cheek and she let her eyes close again, taking a deep breath, simply trying to focus on experiencing her own physicality once more.

"Did you see anything?" She took a moment before opening her eyes, shaking her head. He smiled – not a smile of warmth or tenderness but one of achievement. "Good," he said with a nod. "Then the next task is to take one of Corypheus's men alive. We shall see what he knows."

She felt her lips curl into a grin. She lingered for a moment before pulling away from his touch and the Dread Wolf let his hand fall away.

## Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Harthas sulrahn? – You hear/perceive something?

Vishante kaffas – You shit on my tongue (in Tevene)

Ea son? – Be you well?/Are you alright?

Cullen's prayer is the beginning of Transfigurations 1.

Maddox mentioning "the birds" is a reference to the short story [Paper and Steel](#).

## Chapter 12

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The heat inside the Venatori's tent was oppressive, the heavy Tevinter drapery making it feel as though she were walking into an oven. The shade it provided from the harsh sun of the Wastes did little to stop trickles of sweat from trailing down the back of her neck. Isii wiped at her brow, pressing past the entrance as Bull followed, their latest "catch" struggling uselessly in his grip. Fen'Harel glanced up from the stack of missives he was sifting through, his face drawn with passive disinterest while Dorian lingered by the open tent flap.

"Last one," Iron Bull muttered. "Hopefully he's more helpful than the others. I'm happy to go take out another camp of these assholes, but it's a hell of a lot easier to kill 'em than to take them captive."

Bull tossed the bound Venatori gracelessly into the sand. He sputtered, spitting grit from his lips as he pushed himself awkwardly to his knees. His hands were tied in front of him, balled into fists as he glared at his captors. "Your efforts here are useless," he snapped defensively. "You may have taken our encampment by surprise, but you won't find whatever it is you seek. Use whatever barbaric torture you Southerners like, we will never betray the Elder One."

Isii's hands moved onto her hips, her lips drawn tightly as she glanced to Bull and Dorian. "Tell the soldiers to start getting the others ready to transfer to base camp. Any one of them tries anything, you have my full permission to kill them." She met the Venatori's eyes as the two men retreated. "Personally, I don't care if your comrades make it back to our cells at Skyhold. Sounds like more work than they're worth."

The mage's eyes narrowed, his lips drawing back in a sneer. "When the Elder One ascends, he will return us to our glory. You and your people will be rattus once more. Knife-eared filth; little more than blood for our blades and offerings for our altars."

Isii gave him a disinterested look, her brows lifting. "Charming," she muttered. She glanced to Fen'Harel. "I assume you don't mind if I gag him?" The Dread Wolf shook his head. She picked up a thick strip of cloth from the nearby table as the man looked at her, perplexed.

"What sort of fool interrogates someone who cannot speak?" he asked, scoffing.

"Who said anything about an interrogation?" Fen'Harel asked. He drew Dirthamen's artifact from the table as Isii fixed the gag into place, being less-than-gentle in her application. She could see the man's eyes grow wary, his uncertainty tinged with fear as he eyed the unfamiliar object. Fen'Harel knelt in front of him, taking hold of his wrist.

"This may take some time," he said quietly, glancing over his shoulder.

"Find me when you're done." He gave a short nod and returned to his work, forcing the man's hand onto the stone, the object humming into life as his eyes grew wide.

Isii didn't linger any longer than she had to.

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"Modesty be damned," Dorian muttered, peeling off his robes, stripping down to his breeches. He

used the cloth to wipe at his brow, his skin slick with sweat down to his navel. "Far too hot to pretend to be civilized."

"No complaints here," Bull added with a smirk. Dorian shot him a disapproving look. The three of them had sought what little shade there was within the enemy camp, but there was no escaping the hot, dry air.

Isii shifted uncomfortably, trying to fan herself with her dampened tunic. Even without her jacket, she felt like she was melting. Her sleeves were rolled up, the hem knotted beneath her bust, but it offered little in terms of relief. "Give it a few hours, you'll be freezing."

"I'll face that when it comes," the Tevinter grumbled.

"Can't you just magic up some cold or something?" Bull asked. "I thought you mages would have the advantage when dealing with harsh climates."

"Wouldn't be able to sustain it," Isii said, shaking her head. "In heat like this, it would drain our mana too quickly. A minute or two, tops."

"How much longer is this going to take, do you wonder?" Dorian asked, jerking his head toward the tent where Fen'Harel was working.

"I can't even begin to guess," Isii said with a shrug.

"At least he's being thorough." Dorian took a swig out of his canteen, pouring some of the water into his hand to run over his face. Isii tipped her own against her lips, draining the last of the liquid down her throat.

"Anyone else need a refill?" she asked, gesturing with the empty waterskin. The two men shook their heads. She pushed herself to her feet, following the path toward the outskirts of the camp. Isolated from the rest of the structure was a small, fenced-in space the Venatori had established to protect their supplies. She couldn't help but be thankful the reserves hadn't been damaged during the attack.

She pushed past the latched gate, finding the enclosure empty. She took hold of the lever, pumping a slow trickle of water into her canteen. It was hot to the touch as it spilled over onto her hand so she paused, casting a chill over the barrel that encased it. Ice magic wasn't her strongest skill. In the desert heat, the crystals of frost that collected along the wood melted away almost as quickly as they appeared. Still, it was enough to make her shudder as she returned to the pump, testing the temperature on her fingertips.

She glanced behind her. She was all alone. The walls fenced her in and gave her some level of privacy.

Besides, she was well past the point of caring.

Isii eagerly peeled off her tunic. She filled the canteen, tipping it over her head, letting it spill down her neck and shoulders, a shiver of relief running through her. She ran her hand along overheated skin, spreading the water as she wiped away the sweat and grit of the desert, daydreaming of just how desperately she wanted to take a cold bath when all of this was over. They'd been tracking the Venatori through the Hissing Wastes for over a week now. The unbearable heat left her begging for a cool breeze each day, only to spend each night huddled under layers of furs, trying not to freeze to death. How anything could survive out here was a mystery.

She lifted her braid from the back of her neck, tilting her head down as she let the water fall against

her nape, sighing before finally bringing it to her lips and drinking. She enjoyed the icy chill that now soaked into her breastband, offering some small barrier to the heat – however temporary it may be.

She startled when she heard him clear his throat.

She turned to find Fen'Harel lingering by the entrance to the enclosure. His eyes met hers before he awkwardly cast them aside. "My apologies." He hesitated a moment, his brow furrowing. "You asked me to find you when I was finished."

"I know what I said," she replied, watching him as she took another swig from her canteen. "You don't have to stand there like some tel'tath'mes." He lifted his gaze. "The idea of the Dread Wolf being scandalized by a little skin is *almost* as ridiculous as me suffering through the heat simply for the sake of modesty," she said flatly.

"I didn't want you to think I was leering," he said.

"If you had been, you would've been quieter." She took another sip, wiping the corner of her mouth with the back of her hand before holding the vessel out toward him. "Drink?"

He studied her curiously before stepping closer, taking the canteen. "Thank you," he murmured before bringing it to his lips.

"Any news?"

He swallowed, handing the waterskin back to her. "Our last subject was in charge of the base's correspondences. Orders were given to prepare for mobilization. Given another week or two, this camp and many others like it would have abandoned their strongholds and begin marching into Orlais. By all appearances, Corypheus is positioning himself to take the Arbor Wilds."

Her brow lifted. "He's planning to send his forces into the Wilds?" Fen'Harel nodded calmly. She'd heard tales of the uncharted jungles of southern Orlais. Rumor had it that there were remnants of elven lands within the overgrowth – ruins that the shemlen had never been able to desecrate. As tempting as they were, the Dalish did not tread there. Those who entered the Wilds had a nasty habit of disappearing. "Any idea what he's seeking?"

The Dread Wolf shook his head. "It was never specified in their orders. I do have my suspicions however. If I am correct, we need to return to Skyhold and quickly. The sooner we formulate a plan, the better our chances are at catching his men off-guard."

Isii stooped down to retrieve her tunic, reluctantly slipping it back over her head. "Then get your gear packed. I'll let the others know we're heading out."

"Of course, Inquisitor."

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Isii shivered, pulling her jacket tighter around herself as she scooted closer to their campfire. She knew they wouldn't make it out of the desert by nightfall. She could take comfort in the fact that this was the last night she'd have to sleep in this gods-forsaken land before returning to more temperate climates.

She felt a soft weight on her shoulders, glancing up as the Dread Wolf wordlessly set the large pelt against her back. She took hold of it, wrapping it around herself. "Thank you," she muttered. He merely hummed a small acknowledgement, lowering himself to sit beside her.

“I take it Dorian and Bull have already retired for the evening?”

She nodded. “I think they had their own ideas on how to keep warm.” She thought nothing of it, yet the words felt strangely awkward once they’d met the open air.

He replied only with a simple “Ah,” before lowering his gaze.

They were silent for a time.

Isii let her eyes drift upward, studying the night sky. The moon was always so large here, so close that it felt as if she could reach out and touch it. It was brighter in the Hissing Wastes than anywhere she’d ever been, illuminating the wide expanses of sandy dunes. “You know, for such a horrible place, the sky here is quite beautiful,” she murmured. She let out a small, amused huff, hugging her knees. “Do you remember the first time we came to the Wastes?” she asked, smiling softly as she studied the constellations. “Dorian got creeped out by how our eyes looked in the moonlight. He made such a fuss every time we happened to look at him that I started staring, just to mess with his head. He got so mad he chucked his bedroll at me and then spent the next hour shaking sand out of it.” She laughed and he joined her, chuckling quietly. She lowered her eyes, her fingers picking idly along the seams of her boots. “I had no idea how cold it was going to be at night. I’d only brought my normal blanket-”

“I remember.”

“You had me huddled up against you to keep warm. That position couldn’t have been comfortable to sleep in.”

“Not after the first hour, no.”

“Your shoulder must have been killing you the next day.”

“Healing magic has its uses,” he said dryly, the corner of his lips lifting.

She laughed. They laughed.

And it felt good.

Different.

But good.

She sat in the silence that followed, tucking a few strands of hair behind her ear. “Thank you for this,” she began quietly. “For suggesting we track down the artifact. For figuring out how to make it work. Without that, we’d be stumbling blind right now. You don’t know how relieved I am to have even the slightest clue about what Corypheus plans to do next.”

He gave a simple nod. “As I’ve said before, I take my commitments seriously. Anything I can do to aid the Inquisition, I will do without hesitation.”

She studied his face. Moonlight seemed to soften his features, his eyes shining and opalescent as they reflected the pale blue light. She shifted her posture, unconsciously leaning closer as she tilted her head. “You’re not what I thought you would be, Fen’Harel.” Her admission was quiet, barely given voice. She saw a subtle, hopeful shift in his expression.

“Is that so?” he whispered.

“You were good to me. When you and I were-” She stopped herself, somehow finding it difficult to say. She thought they’d been lovers, but can you be lovers with someone when you don’t know who they are? She cleared her throat, starting again. “It wasn’t an act, was it?” she asked, looking up into his face. “You meant it.”

The look behind his eyes was so caring, so familiar that it made her stomach flutter. His hand rested tentatively against her own. “Every word.”

She wet her lips and watched as his eyes followed the motion, a warm tension building in her chest. “Even now?”

The whole world seemed to focus on the space between them as it narrowed. Two sets of eyes traced parting lips, both uncertain, the signals subtle and easily mistaken and yet they seemed so close to brushing against a moment unlike any they’d had in months.

Close enough now to catch the scent of his skin.

Close enough to hear each soft, sighing breath.

Close enough that she could almost feel the warmth of him cutting through the chill of the night air.

*“Fasta vass, Bull!”*

The sound of Dorian’s objection startled her, his hand withdrawing, the shout quickly followed by the Qunari’s laughter.

“That’s not funny, you giant oaf!” Isii shifted away, glancing toward the tent where their voices slowly lowered in volume.

“You love it.”

“Festis bei umo canavarum,” the mage hissed.

The tent fell quiet again, only the occasional low murmuring breaking the now painfully awkward silence. She glanced to Fen’Harel before lowering her gaze, beginning to push herself to her feet. “It’s late,” she muttered.

He cleared his throat. “Right,” he said, nodding. “It’s probably best-”

“-we get some sleep,” she finished. “Ideally I want to get moving before daybreak in order to avoid some of the heat.”

“Reasonable.”

She gave him a small, uncertain look, lingering a moment as she hugged the furs around herself. “Well... goodnight.”

He echoed the sentiment before she disappeared into her tent.

Translations:

tel'tath'mes – a male virgin. Lit. “not yet wet”

Fasta vass – a curse word in Tevene

Festis bei umo canavarum – you will be the death of me (in Tevene)

Curious about Fen'Harel's POV during the last scene? [You can read it here.](#)



## Chapter 13

### Chapter Notes

Warning: Some strong language ahead.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You’re certain he intends to march his forces into the Arbor Wilds?”

Fen’Harel gave the Commander a nod. “According to the orders given to the encampment we took, Corypheus is having his strongholds uproot themselves and begin mobilization. We have a week, maybe less, before his forces start moving southward in earnest.”

Cullen let out a tense breath, his brow furrowed as he looked down at the massive map stretched out before him. “It’s not much of a head start, but it’s something.”

“But why the Wilds?” Josephine asked. “Isn’t that extremely dangerous?”

“It is relatively uncharted territory,” Leliana said.

“With a nasty reputation of explorers disappearing once they’ve travelled beyond its borders,” Cullen added dryly.

“I suspect there are certain ancient safeguards still in place that may be responsible for that,” Fen’Harel explained calmly. “Corypheus is likely aware of this danger, motivating him to sacrifice his forces’ footing in other locations in order to offer support.”

“But what is Corypheus hoping to find in such a remote area?” Josephine asked.

“The Fade has shown me an elven temple that lies deep within the Wilds.” The Dread Wolf traced his finger against the southern end of the map. “I believe that may be the destination he hopes to reach.”

Leliana’s brows lifted. “His people have been ransacking elven ruins since Haven. What he hopes to find, however, continues to elude us.”

“Which should surprise no one.” The witch made no attempt to hide her smug tone as she pushed her way into the room. Fen’Harel caught the irritated tension in the spymaster’s eyes as Lady Morrigan approached the table, the heavy door falling shut behind her. He let out a slow breath, returning his attention to studying the map. “Tis fortunate for you then that I can assist. What Corypheus seeks in those forgotten woods is as ancient as it is dangerous.”

“Which is?” Isii asked.

Morrigan smiled. “Tis best if I showed you.”

Fen’Harel did not lift his gaze from the war table, muttering dismissively. “If your intent is to dazzle her with a demonstration of your eluvian, Lady Morrigan, I assure you- she is more than familiar with the concept.”

Morrigan's eyes narrowed.

Josephine looked puzzled. "Eluvian?"

"An elven artifact from a time long before the empire was lost to human greed," Morrigan explained.

"You give the shemlen far too much credit," Fen'Harel said flatly.

"What? Do you suppose the elves merely decided one day to let their civilization fall to dust?" He gave her a hard look, yet said nothing. Her hands went to her hips as she studied him, arching her brow. "And since when do you attend advisory meetings?"

"Solas is the one who gathered this intel," Leliana said.

The witch hummed disdainfully. "I thought that's what written reports were for."

"Let us focus on the issue at hand, please," Cullen said. "What precisely is this eluvian?"

"A mirror," Morrigan continued, "or rather a gateway that takes the form of a mirror. With it, Corypheus could pass into the Crossroads."

"Crossroads?" Fen'Harel neatly folded his hands behind his back. "I suppose that is a rather quaint term for it."

"Whatever name it had is lost to time," Morrigan said, her tone souring. "Unless, of course, you feel it truly necessary to interrupt me in order to squabble over the terminology used by generations of long dead elves?" His jaw clenched, but he allowed the moment to pass. "As I was saying, it is a place between places, where the elves once passed from mirror to mirror. It is not the Fade, but it is very close. Someone with enough power could tear down the ancient barriers and enter the Fade in the flesh - like Corypheus wanted to do with the anchor when this whole mess began."

Cullen frowned. "What happens when Corypheus enters the Fade?"

"Why, he will gain his heart's desire and take the power of a god," Morrigan replied. "Or - and this is more likely - the lunatic will unleash forces that tear the world apart."

"Doubtful," Fen'Harel said. "Unless he is a more dangerous fool than I predicted."

"And what, pray tell, is that supposed to mean?"

"These Crossroads, as you call them, are vulnerable to collapse," he explained. "While it is possible that he may seek a path beyond the Veil through that realm, he would just as likely find himself thrown into an unending pit if he destroyed the thinning fabric of reality that holds such a place together. As disastrous as that would be for anyone hoping to ever use an eluvian in the future, it would not further his goal."

Morrigan folded her arms tightly across her chest. "Then what exactly do *you* think holds his interest in the Wilds, since you seem to suddenly have such insight?"

"That temple contains powers far more dangerous than a mere eluvian - assuming, of course, that it has survived the passage of time. My explorations of the Fade have told me of a relic at the very heart of the temple - the Vir'Abelasan."

Isii peered at him. "The place of the Way of Sorrows?"

"It was a path walked by those who once served Mythal," Fen'Harel explained.

"And it's something you believe Corypheus would want?"

"His knowledge of ancient relics is clearly advanced enough," he reasoned. "Eluvians, though rare, can be found elsewhere. He is risking the entirety of his army in order to breach this *one* temple. The Vir'Abelasan is a far greater prize to be taken in conquest. It cannot be a coincidence." He returned his attention to the map. "The Arbor Wilds consists of rather dense terrain, meaning there are distinct pockets of enclosed space where one could easily be surrounded without knowing it. There are only a few routes one could use when trying to move an entire army through. We can use this environment to our advantage."

"I could have scouts there within days to survey the area," Leliana said.

"They should place a heavy focus on creating a perimeter with areas of cover for ranged combat," the Dread Wolf said, thinking aloud as he studied the map. "Mages and archers can attack from hidden positions to catch the enemy off guard and keep them contained. The goal would be to drive Corypheus's forces into the center of a noose that will quickly close in around them. Have them encounter ground troops that are few in number - make them believe they have the advantage of an overwhelming majority. When these forces flee, Samson will not resist the urge to pursue. Not when he thinks his sights are set on a quick victory. We can use this to lead them into a trap."

"You want to use my men as bait?"

Fen'Harel glanced up as Cullen frowned at him. "Some of them, yes. We must be willing to make the necessary sacrifices in the pursuit of victory. We have a chance to stop Corypheus once and for all in these Wilds. Is that an opportunity you are willing to allow to pass you by?" The Commander's concerns did not appear to lift, but he held his tongue. "If we make certain they are heavily armored and well-equipped, some in that unit are likely to survive. This will also reinforce the illusion that they are not mere fodder for the front lines."

"So now you are not only an advisor, but our military strategist as well?" Morrigan scoffed. "Tis impressive for a man with no experience."

"It is merely a suggestion," the Dread Wolf said flatly, trying to resist the urge to grit his teeth. "As always, the Commander and the Inquisitor have the final say."

Isii braced her hands against the edge of the table. "So we convince Samson that he's just run into some small pocket of our forces and use them to lead him to the full brunt of our army?" Fen'Harel nodded. She turned her gaze to Cullen, brows lifted. "Thoughts?"

"It does make for a sound strategy," the Commander replied. "As long as we can control the path they take into the Wilds."

Leliana folded her arms. "That should not be difficult. A few felled trees and my scouts can block off alternative routes."

"How quickly can we mobilize?" Isii asked.

"Our head start is small," Cullen began, "but if we begin immediately, it should give us enough time to get our army in place before his forces arrive."

"We should gather our allies before we march," Josephine said.

Cullen nodded. "If they are willing to send reinforcements, now would be the time to act."

“They should be instructed not to draw attention to themselves, however,” Fen’Harel added.

“Good point,” Isii said. “If Corypheus gets word of a bunch of grand Orlesian marches of chevaliers flanked by waving banners, it could ruin the whole plan. The simpler, the better.”

“Then perhaps we break our troops into smaller units for travel and instruct our allies to do the same,” he continued. “If he receives reports of Inquisition activity -”

“We don’t want him thinking there is an army waiting for him.” Isii stared down at the table, worrying her fingertip over her lips. “There’s still the matter of the temple. If something goes wrong, I don’t want this Vir’Abelasan to fall into Corypheus’s hands. I’m going to head out tonight with a small team. We go in, scout the temple and neutralize the threat however we have to.”

“Then I will accompany you.” Isii gave Morrigan a skeptical look, but the witch remained undeterred. “The Arbor Wilds do not take kindly to visitors. Old elvhen magic lingers in those woods.”

Fen’Harel began to object but the Ambassador quickly spoke over him. “We’d be remiss to not take advantage of your knowledge, Lady Morrigan. Please, lend us your expertise.”

Morrigan gave a small grin. “Tis why I came here, although it is good to see its value recognized. And if this Vir’Abelasan is truly a boon worthy of all the risks Corypheus is willing to make in order to obtain it, then perhaps it would be wise to acquire it for ourselves.”

“I would not recommend that,” Fen’Harel said quickly.

Her smile deepened. “Well then, I suppose tis a good thing your opinion is not the only one that matters.”

“We have the best chance of success if we work together in this,” Isii said before directing her gaze towards her advisers. “The three of you - coordinate closely in your separate roles. I want our army ready to wipe Corypheus’s forces off of the map and I want to make certain they don’t see it coming. The Inquisition began as a handful of soldiers. Thanks to you, we’re now a force that will topple a self-proclaimed god.”

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Isii frowned as she heard the door to her bedroom open, footsteps quickly ascending the stairs. She glanced up from her pack, her brow tensing further as the Dread Wolf came into view. “Not even bothering with knocking?” she asked, irritated as she returned her attention to bundling her clothing for their journey. “I thought I made it clear that you weren’t welcome in here without an invitation.”

“I know,” he said quickly, drawing closer. “I am sorry for the intrusion, but-”

“You should be packing your things,” she said. “I want to make it to the base of the mountain by sundown.”

“It’s urgent that I speak with you while we still have the chance to do so privately.”

She let out a slow breath as she continued with her work. “Fine. Talk.”

“I would caution you not to heed Lady Morrigan’s advice concerning the Well of Sorrows,” he said stiffly, tucking his hands behind his back. “Ideally, I would not have her assist us with this mission.”

Isii arched her brow skeptically, peering at him. “She’s no threat to you.”

“No,” he said, “but I do not trust her.”

Isii shook her head, stuffing a tightly rolled tunic into her pack. “I’m not going to refuse her aid simply because you have a bad feeling.”

“I fear what she may do once she learns of the power the Well contains,” he began cautiously. “The Vir’Abelasan... it is not simply an artifact. It is the embodiment of knowledge gathered through the ages. It is a collective conscience built from the fabric of thousands of priests who served Mythal over the centuries. It contains everything that the People once were, everything they once knew.”

Isii was silent for a time, studying him. “That’s...” Words fled her as a look of awe spread over her features. “If we can recover it... Do you realize what that could mean for me? For my people?”

“It is not for you or for the Dalish to lay claim to,” he said firmly.

Isii frowned. “Excuse me?” she asked, taken aback. “And whose decision is that to make? Yours?”

“That knowledge comes at a price that you should not be willing to pay.”

She folded her arms tightly across her chest. “And I’m not allowed to make that choice for myself?”

His expression grew tense, something akin to disappointment on his features. “You are making this personal when it should not be,” he said softly.

“Of course it’s personal,” she said, her voice lifting. “You knew. You *knew* something like this existed, how much that would mean to me, and yet you never bothered to tell me?”

“Because it is dangerous,” he snapped. “You shouldn’t even be entertaining the idea of taking the Well for yourself. It needs to be destroyed.”

She gawked at him, her brows lifted in shock. “Are you insane?”

“You cannot let it fall into Corypheus’s hands-”

“No,” she cut him off quickly. “You’re worried about it falling into *my* hands. If that wasn’t your concern, you would have *me* take it instead of destroying it.”

He shook his head. “That is not what this is about.”

“Isn’t it?” she asked, her head tilting. “You wouldn’t have me throw away a millenia of collected wisdom otherwise. Do you really think I would abuse something like that? Or do you just hate the idea of anyone else remembering the world you come from?”

“Do not put words in my mouth. Trust that I have your best interests-”

“Trust you?” she asked incredulously. “Do you *really* expect me to trust you after everything you’ve done?” She could see his eyes narrowing, wincing in response, but she did not stop.

“Tolerating an alliance with you and actually having mutual trust are two very different things,” she said, her hands pressing to her hips. “Do not mistake one for the other.”

“What more do I have to do to appease you, Inquisitor?” he growled. “Would you have me grovel? I have done *nothing* but assist you. I have done nothing but give my time and my energy for your benefit-”

“Bullshit,” she snapped. “You’re doing this for yourself, Fen’Harel. You’re using the Inquisition because you can’t clean up the mess you made by giving your damn orb to Corypheus in the first place. Don’t pretend like this is some great act of charity.”

“The Well is not some trifling artifact your people are so fond of stumbling across and clinging to, trying to shape some half-formed history from.” His words came quickly, his tongue sharpened in anger. “This is dangerous and powerful magic and perhaps it would be wise for you to recognize that I know more than you do on the subject.”

“And whose fault is it that my people only have scraps of the past to cling to?” she spat.

“Stop changing the subject. You need to focus on what is in front of you.”

“I *am* focused on what’s in front of me,” she said, angling her chin as she glared up into his face, “and all I see is an arrogant would-be god who keeps fucking the world over because he always assumes he knows best.”

He closed the distance between them quickly, anger carved deep into the angles of his face. He took a sharp breath, lips parting to speak before he pursed them tightly, his hands balling into fists. Even as he collected himself, the intensity of his glare did not lessen. “If you do not wish to hear my council, then there is no point in speaking further.” His voice was cold, his lips pulled into a sneer as he turned to go. “By your leave, Inquisitor.”

It did not take long for him to stalk out of the room, the door slamming behind him.

## Chapter End Notes

Man that last bit she says to him feels weird to write after Trespasser.

I took it straight from my outline, so it's been sitting in my notes for months. But hot damn, the context makes that one especially harsh.

## Chapter 14

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Do you feel the magic in the air crackling?” Morrigan asked, her chin angling higher as if to better attune her senses. “Something very old and very powerful stirs here.”

“Your powers of perception are as impressive as ever, Lady Morrigan,” Fen’Harel called back to her. From the flatness of his tone, one couldn’t be certain whether it was a compliment or a slight. Isii glanced back from the head of the group, catching the witch’s eyes as they narrowed suspiciously.

“All I feel is sweaty,” Sera complained loudly, swatting a bug off of her neck. The Arbor Wilds was certainly living up to its reputation. The terrain was proving difficult - the ground made uneven from thick, protruding growths, vines and roots forcing them to take caution with each step. It was sometimes difficult to pick their way through the dense greenery, Bull grumbling repeatedly about his horns getting snagged on low-hanging branches. The air was heavy with moisture, oppressively damp and warm, offering no relief as perspiration beaded on their skin. The rivers were wide but thankfully shallow enough to wade through - though it left Isii with the unpleasant realization that her boots were not as well-sealed as she thought they’d be.

“We have to be getting close, right?” Sera continued. “All these bits of broken stone and stuff, statues of elfy shite...figure the temple’s gotta be nearby, yeah?”

“One would imagine,” Dorian muttered.

“Heads up,” the Iron Bull said, gesturing with a nod. “Beyond that ridge. I see an archway or something. Could be an entrance.”

Isii followed the line of his gaze, struggling slightly to push her body up the slick incline in order to see for herself. Sure enough, there was a tall structure in the distance - crumbling, but in far better condition than the scattered ruins that the wilds had already reclaimed. Though much of it was obscured by the overgrowth, she could see the slender curves of the carved stone, the passage guarded over by two large moss-covered statues of Fen’Harel.

She shot a glance over to the Dread Wolf who walked silently by her side. “*More of your statues in another god’s temple?*” she murmured in Elvhen. His eyes found hers, his lips drawn tightly. “*Is this another false display of honor, like in Dirthamen’s?*”

“No,” he answered coolly. She waited for him to elaborate but he said nothing more, fixing his eyes ahead as he quickened his pace. Isii let out a slow breath. Fen’Harel had barely spoken to her since their argument in her quarters. It had been days now - travelling together, making camp together. He avoided her gaze more often than not, his face stitched into a scowl when he didn’t wear his normal cold neutrality. More often than not, he would only engage her when she asked him a question, and even then his answers were short and straight to the point.

Apparently that wasn’t going to change anytime soon.

*Stubborn ass.*

She followed wordlessly as Fen’Harel walked ahead, passing into the archway. The entrance led into a long tunnel of beautifully carved stone, the shadows slowly peeling back as they reached the

other side. It let out onto a balcony overlooking a stunning courtyard, the late afternoon sun glittering off of the gold embedded in the masonry. An elf-made lake shimmered below them, its surface dancing from the cascading waterfalls that fed it. In the distance, the lakebed sloped into a sudden drop-off, water hurtling into the unseen depths, forming a ring around a circular building at its center. A long bridge connected the two structures, stretching across the wide expanse. The trees there were lush, their leaves waxy and bright, their branches giving way to the graceful statues that dominated the landscape. Though their figures varied, the subject was always the same - dragons.

There was no question that this was Mythal's domain.

Bull let out a low whistle as they paused, surveying the area. "Elves built all this?" Sera asked.

"Before the Imperium destroyed it," Dorian replied.

"The Temple of Mythal," Morrigan began with a tone of authority. "Constructed in an age when elves, not men, dominated this land. They believed Mythal a goddess of justice. Elves came here to request judgement after they proved their worth."

"It surprises me to hear you speak of it with such reverence," Fen'Harel murmured, "considering you are human."

Morrigan kept her eyes ahead, gazing over the ruins. "If my mother taught me anything, it was to respect the past - those elements either lost or made precious through scarcity."

"Commendable, I suppose," he said dryly.

"There was little else about her that was."

"This place looks untouched," Dorian said, following as Isii led them down a large staircase. "I wonder if it looked much the same back when it was first built. Though I'd imagine their landscaper would have a fit to see it as it is now."

Fen'Harel glanced back to him only briefly. "I suspect the greenery would be the least of his worries."

The group fell silent as they reached the bottom of the stairs. Isii scanned their surroundings, searching for any other doors or passageways, but the bridge ahead was the only way forward. The structure still looked solid - a wide stone pathway guarded by two dragon statues, their heads tucked demurely to their shoulders. The doors beyond the bridge were nearly two stories in height, covered in an emerald mural that shone with such brilliance that it was hard to tell whether the sun or magic was responsible for the glow.

Bull nudged Dorian, lowering his voice. "You have any idea how much this place is worth?"

"Don't let Solas hear you say that," Dorian hissed.

"We are not here to cart off the last traces of elven glory," Fen'Harel replied curtly.

Sera snorted.

"This is ancient ground," he continued, "deserving of our respect."

"I'm just saying..." Bull offered with a shrug.



"Its extravagance is rather breathtaking, I will admit," Dorian said.

"And this coming from a Vint."

"Perhaps it was meant to kindle a sense of awe in its visitors," Fen'Harel said.

Dorian laughed. "It certainly accomplishes that."

"Piss on it," Sera muttered. "Stupid elves wasting stupid coin on a bunch of rubbish."

"Sera, that's enough," Isii chided.

"Don't tell me you still believe in this shit? You're the bloody Herald of Andraste."

"And I don't believe in the Maker any more now than I did when this whole mess started," Isii said. She paused, trying to soften her tone. "Come on. Let's keep moving."

She was the first to step out onto the bridge, her eyes scanning it for any cracks that might show weak spots to avoid. The fact that this place was still standing was impressive enough- but having it be so well preserved was puzzling. There were signs of erosion where nature had encroached on the original structure, but it didn't look as if it had been tampered with at all. Most of the ruins she'd seen had clearly been picked over by explorers over the ages. Walls were pocked where murals had once been, chipped away from the stone by archaeologists or those looking to sell it to some wealthy collector. Excavation tools were often left behind, along with camping materials. But here - it was pristine. It had an eerie atmosphere, as if the passage of time had never truly touched this place.

"Everyone get back!" The sharpness of Fen'Harel's voice caught her off guard. Isii turned to look, frowning, faintly aware of a low hum that seemed to vibrate the air around her. She caught the looks of panic on the faces of her companions, everyone scrambling back to the edge of the bridge, their eyes cast upward. She quickly followed their gaze, spotting the blue glow that now crackled around the heads of the dragon statues on either side of her. She cursed, turning to run as she felt the sharp energy surge, power gathering so quickly it made her skin prickle, her heart jumping up into her throat. She didn't see him move but felt the weight of the Dread Wolf's arm wrapping around her waist, dragging her roughly into a fade step as an intense blast sent them both careening to the ground.

Isii coughed, choking back the dust kicked up by the explosion as she felt him tense beneath her. "Are you alright?" he asked.

She struggled to steady her breaths. "I will be. You?" He nodded and she pulled away, awkwardly pushing herself off of him before offering a hand up. She looked over to the others, all of whom had lost their footing but appeared unharmed.

"What in the Void was that?!" Sera asked.

"A safeguard," Fen'Harel answered as Isii helped pull him to his feet. "A way to protect the temple from invasion."

"Invasion?" the rogue echoed, frowning. "Who invades some stupid holy house?"

"Someone who isn't too fond of Mythral, I'd imagine." Isii shot a wary look to the Dread Wolf, but his face told her nothing. Fen'Harel was never very forthcoming with information about the individual Creators and the subject of Mythral had never come up. Isii wasn't certain how he felt about her or what kind of person she had been - but considering that he presumably betrayed the

all-mother as he had all the others, she couldn't imagine the two of them had been on good terms.

"It seems the magic here is still strong. Stronger than I had suspected," Morrigan murmured.

Fen'Harel studied the figures before quietly nodding to himself. He cautiously stepped forward, his staff emanating a soft, pulsing glow as he began to summon. As he cast, a barrier took shape; an arched bubble slowly emerging from the stone surface of the bridge. The dragon statues crackled to life once more, sparking down against the barrier, energy sizzling with a hiss as the two forces made contact. He took a slow breath and pulled the barrier open until it formed a tunnel.

"Rather ingenious solution, Solas."

The Dread Wolf cast a glance to Dorian before shrugging. "It is of little consequence. Though I would appreciate it if we moved quickly. This is something I will have to actively maintain until we are through."

Isii didn't hesitate to cross over onto the bridge, the others following with varying levels of reluctance. Fen'Harel let the barrier drop once they were through and the dragon statues fell still, no longer sensing them as they stood out of range. If he were any other mage, he would have been worn from the effort, but Fen'Harel did not even attempt to feign exhaustion, instead walking briskly toward the doors.

The arrow that suddenly sank into his shoulder caught them all off-guard.

A curse flew from The Dread Wolf's lips as he grasped the shaft that jutted from his flesh, the painful shock causing him to collapse. His knee had not even hit the ground before more arrows flew forth, sailing through the air. Fen'Harel cast barriers over their party as their attackers came into view at the far end of the bridge, slipping out of cover.

Isii's eyes widened. They were elves, hooded and armored, their pale skin marked with Mythal's vallaslin. A row of archers stayed at the end of the bridge while four men bearing giant war hammers rushed to close the distance.

"Venavis!" Fen'Harel shouted to the elves, pushing himself to his feet. "Tel'ele sar banal'linen!" His answer came with another shot, the Dread Wolf barely deflecting it before it could sink into his chest. "Surir in atisha!"

"I don't think they like your gibberish, Solas!" Sera shouted, running as she fired a series of arrows at the charging elves, making a triumphant hoot as she knocked one off the side of the bridge. "Gotcha!" Bull was already rushing ahead, his axe primed to strike.

"We do not need to fight them!" Fen'Harel snapped.

"Pretty sure they'd beg to differ," Dorian quipped before casting a wall of flame to block off the archers. Isii gripped her staff, lightning crackling along her skin as she channeled it into the weapon, whipping an arc of electricity into the nearest melee fighter, sending him flying off of his feet. She caught sight of Morrigan as she ran forward, tossing her staff aside. Before Isii could respond, the witch disappeared into a sudden burst of black smoke, reemerging as a giant spider and descending on two of the elven warriors.

*That's... different.*

The fighting did not last long. The elves were fast and did not fall easily, but their weapons were no match for the amount of power they were up against.

At least their deaths were swift.

“A giant spider?!” Sera shrieked, gawking at the witch. “A giant... *fucking*... spider?!”

Morrigan shifted form with little more than a shrug, brushing dust off her now-human hands. “I don’t see what the fuss is about. Tis an effective spell.”

The Dread Wolf gripped the arrow shaft jutting from his shoulder, hissing between clenched teeth as he gently twisted it. “Let me take a look,” Isii offered, lowering her staff and closing the distance between them.

“It moves easily enough,” he muttered, though she could hear the tension in his throat as he swallowed down his discomfort. She pulled a small blade from her belt, carefully widening the hole in his tunic where the arrow had pierced him. Blood had already soaked through the dense fabric, pooling against her fingertips as she pressed them around the wound, carefully taking the shaft in hand. His jaw clenched around a sharp breath as she gently pulled. There was too much tension to simply slide it out again. She’d lose the arrowhead if she didn’t make room.

Isii pursed her lips. “I’m going to have to cut it out.”

“I am well aware of the procedure,” the Dread Wolf said tersely. “This is not the first time I’ve been shot with an arrow, nor I suspect the last.” He let his hand hover over the wound, casting a soft pulse that she suspected dulled his pain. She silently set to work, carefully cutting a path for the arrowhead to be cleanly retrieved.

“So. An ambush,” Bull muttered, surveying the dead elves that now littered the bridge. “Impressive work.”

“Were we really just attacked by elves?” Dorian asked excitedly. “Elves wielding strange magic at that! Could you feel it?”

“It seems this temple is not deserted after all,” Fen’Harel said grimly.

Sera nudged one of the bodies with her foot. “Think they’ve got anything good on ‘em?”

“Rummage their corpses, by all means,” Morrigan said with a dismissive wave of her hand.

Fen’Harel frowned as Sera crouched over the fallen warrior. “Can you not even attempt to show them some respect?”

“Why?” Sera asked, scoffing. “It’s not like they’re alive anymore to care.” The Dread Wolf’s expression grew strained, but he offered no further objections as she began to loot the corpse.

Dorian drew closer. “Who were they? They do not look Dalish.”

Sera pursed her lips. “How’d you figure?” She turned the dead man’s head, pressing her fingers into his cheeks as she pushed back his hood. “They’ve got the same elfy dealies on their faces.”

“I’ve never seen any Dalish in armor like that,” Isii said, her eyes still focused on her task. “Besides, my people avoid the Arbor Wilds. For every rumor we’ve heard of the ruins down here, there’s a story of some clan whose people go missing after trying to explore them.”

Morrigan arched her brow thoughtfully. “Perhaps these *creatures* are the reason few return from the Wilds.”

“And I am certain they would be pleased to hear you refer to them as such,” Fen’Harel snapped, his eyes narrowing. “Perhaps you should speak a little louder next time.”

“Solas.”

Isii could see his anger clearly enough when his eyes met hers - but there was pain there too. Something deep and aching that pooled behind his gaze. It was gone quickly, his face hardening. She wiped her blade on her hip, tucking it back into her belt before bracing one hand against his shoulder, the other gripping the arrow. “Deep breath-”

“Just do it.”

She pulled as he grimaced, growling against gritted teeth. The arrow came free and he clamped his hand over his shoulder, letting out a slow breath through his nose as he healed the wound. “Let’s be done with this,” he said stiffly, his other hand tightening into a fist around his staff as he stalked toward the doors.

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“Why would *this* be here?”

Fen’Harel turned, irritated to find the group had slowed behind him, Morrigan’s comment fixing their attention on the stone carving. “We should not delay-”

“It’s not like it’s the first wolfy statue we’ve seen,” Sera said, ignoring him as she shot a curious look to Morrigan. “Why’s that so weird here?”

“It depicts the Dread Wolf, Fen’Harel,” Morrigan said, drawing closer to the statue. “In elven tales, he tricks their gods into sealing themselves away in the Beyond for all time. Setting a Fen’Harel in Mythal’s greatest sanctum is as blasphemous as painting Andraste naked in the Chantry.”

“That would certainly make services more interesting for some,” Dorian said with a laugh. “Still - there are Chantries that display statues of Andraste’s betrayer Maferath as part of the Chant. Could this fulfill some similar function?”

“Perhaps,” the witch said thoughtfully. “It may serve as a reminder to the faithful to remain vigilant.”

Fen’Harel took a slow, impatient breath.

“For all your *knowledge*, Lady Morrigan, you cannot resist giving legend the weight of history,” he said sharply. “The wise do not mistake one for the other.”

The witch looked at him skeptically, her hands settling on her hips. “Pray tell, what meaning does our *elven expert* sense lurking behind this?” she snapped.

“None we can discern by staring at it.”

“Truly enlightening, Solas,” she sniped. “I cannot imagine why I don’t rely on your insight more often.”

He could feel his jaw growing tight as his eyes narrowed. “Do we intend to seek a way to proceed further into the temple,” he growled, “or are you more interested in wasting our time, speculating about meaningless decorations?”

“What? Now Solas thinks this elfy business is all rubbish too?” Sera asked, snickering.  
“Wouldn’t’ve guessed that.”

Morrigan began to retort, but Isii lifted her hand. “Save it,” she said. The witch scowled but held her tongue. “We can argue about this another time. Right now we’ve got to find the Vir’Abelasan.”

Fen’Harel nodded, turning on his heel. “This way. There are doors up ahead that will lead us further into the inner sanctum. It lies in the very heart of the temple.”

“You seem rather confident in that assertion,” Morrigan said darkly.

“I have seen this place before in the Fade,” he replied. She hummed, not quite convinced.

Fen’Harel knew where he needed to lead them. The temple’s magics remained strong - that much was made clear by the statues guarding the bridge. It was only reasonable to believe that the seals that blocked the parishioners’ path would still be in place. The rituals themselves were easy enough to perform. It would slow them down somewhat, but they could still get into the temple and out again before sundown.

The Dread Wolf froze when he heard movement, gesturing to the others to stop. He paused, listening until he heard it again - the soft scraping of metal on stone.

“We are not alone,” he murmured quietly. He glanced over to Isii, his brow tensing. “If we lower our weapons, I may be able to solve this peacefully.” She looked hesitant, her eyes shifting nervously as she scanned the courtyard. “*Please*,” he stressed. She studied his face a moment before nodding, giving the order.

Fen’Harel stooped down, setting his staff onto the stone, lifting his hands as he stood once more. “Lethallinen,” he called out to them, raising his voice so he knew their audience could hear. “Venir athimsha vir lanalin i atisha in var lath’inen.”

He fell silent, waiting for a response. He hoped that they would respond well to the ancient greeting. If anything, it seemed to at least have given them pause as he could no longer hear their approach. “*We are not your enemies*,” he continued in Elvhen. “*Permit us the chance to speak and we will lay our purpose out plainly. Danger is coming. We seek only to keep this temple and its contents from falling into the wrong hands.*”

The Sentinels revealed themselves slowly, weapons raised as they drew closer. “Are you sure about this?” Isii hissed under her breath.

“*I will not allow them to harm you*,” Fen’Harel replied firmly, keeping his voice low, “*if it comes to that.*” He slipped back into Common so the others could comprehend. “We do not know how many of these men are left to guard this temple. A diplomatic approach may be our best option.”

“Or they could simply round us up,” Bull muttered. “Would make killing us a whole lot easier if we’re disarmed and standing still.”

“You have four mages with you right now, Bull,” Isii whispered. “As long as we have magic, we’re never fully disarmed. We can handle this if things get ugly.”

“Oh goodie,” Sera grumbled. “Magic’ll save the day. Just what I want to hear.”

The Sentinels closed the distance, stopping a few paces away, holding a steady aim on the group with their bows drawn. The Dread Wolf watched them intently, ready to cast a barrier around his companions if his gesture of good faith was rejected. After a tense moment, one of them spoke.

*“You use a formal greeting - words not spoken in these halls for many ages. You are one of our own?”*

“Yes,” Fen’Harel answered plainly.

“What’s he saying?” Sera hissed out of the corner of her mouth. Isii shushed her.

*“And the others?”*

*“They are here to help. I could not come alone.”*

The Sentinel paused to consider this before turning to his comrades. *“Judirthan var rajelan. He will decide their fate. Guard them until word is sent.”*

*“How can we be certain we will remain unharmed?”* Isii asked in Elvhen. The Sentinel studied her a moment, doing little to hide his disdain.

*“Do you still breathe, shemlen?”* Fen’Harel could see that the word stung, but to her credit Isii kept an unflinching expression. *“Then that means you will live. For now.”*

He turned then, not allowing her a reply as he quickly retreated. The other Sentinels lowered their weapons, though stood alert, watching them.

“Now what?” Sera asked.

Fen’Harel let out a slow breath. “Now we wait.”

## Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Venavis! Tel’ele sar banal’linen - Stop! We are not your enemies.

Surir in atisha - We come in peace.

Lethallinen. Venir athimsha vir lanalin i atisha in var lath’inen. - My kinsmen. We humbly walk the path of the mother with peace in our hearts.

Judirthan var rajelan. - I will tell our commander.

# Chapter 15

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The anchor did not seem to like this place.

Isii knew it was foolish to attribute any sort of consciousness to the mark in her hand. Perhaps it was the ancient magic still lingering in this temple that caused it to stir, flaring as if drawn to energies that felt familiar. She hissed softly, a tense breath pushed quietly through her teeth as she rubbed her thumb along the scar. Magic thrummed beneath the surface of her skin, green light pulsing from the wound like some foreign heartbeat. It didn't concern her. This happened, from time to time. It did not cause her pain like it did in those early days - merely a feeling of pressure, like the anchor was building inside her and desperately craved release.

She was not surprised when she lifted her eyes to find him watching her.

He always did.

Especially when the anchor was active.

Once, she'd found his concern endearing. When Solas looked over the mark with that familiar furrow in his brow, she'd silently equate it to a nervous parent checking their child for scrapes or bruises after the slightest fall. She'd seen it as a gesture of affection. Her lover wanted to make certain that this strange and foreign gift she had been given wasn't causing her distress.

His concern felt different now.

"Is it causing you pain?" Fen'Harel asked.

"It's nothing," Isii said, shaking her head.

"May I see?"

It wasn't a request. Not truly. There was a firmness in his voice that made her want to scoff. He'd spent days avoiding her - but one minor flare up from his precious anchor and suddenly she had his rapt attention. She kept her thoughts to herself as she offered her hand to him. He wordlessly moved closer, taking a seat beside her on the stone steps where she rested. He avoided her eye as he touched her, fingers curling softly around her wrist while the others carefully probed the scarred skin of her palm. His magic felt strange against it now, as it had since his powers were restored. It was as if their energy vibrated at the same frequency, naturally drawn towards each other, moving with a fluidity that felt familiar.

"Dian, shemlen."

Isii glanced up as Sera glared at the guard, her nose scrunched in a sneer. "What'd you say to me?" she asked, her hands moving onto her hips.

"Tel'josh."

Sera's scowl deepened. "*Can. You. Speak. Normal?*" she asked pointedly, emphasizing each word loudly as if he were hard of hearing. The guard visibly tensed.

“Sit down, Sera,” Isii said firmly. “Your pacing is making them nervous.”

The elf grumbled as she obeyed, storming off to a far corner of the courtyard to sit down. Isii couldn't blame her for being restless. They all were. These Sentinels, as Fen'Harel called them, had kept them cooped up in this courtyard for over an hour now. The longer they waited, the more anxious they became.

“Sera was not a good choice for this mission,” Fen'Harel muttered.

“I didn't know how secure the temple was going to be,” she replied. “I wanted someone who knew their way around a lockpick. She's been helpful with other ruins before.”

“Cole has as well,” he said pointedly.

“Do you intend to question all of my decisions?” she snapped. “I didn't ask for your opinion.”

He fell silent then, his lips pursed tightly as he returned his focus to her hand. Isii let out a tense breath. “I left Cole behind for your sake,” she whispered. He studied her curiously as she continued. “He has a habit of saying things he shouldn't. Revealing secrets. Even though I know he wouldn't do so intentionally... You were already concerned about Morrigan coming with us. And she's the only shemlen I've met who knows enough about the elvhen pantheon that she might start to put the pieces together if she heard him say the wrong thing.” She locked eyes with him then, her tone firm. “You're not the only one invested in keeping your secret safe.”

He watched her for a time, inspecting her features before giving a small nod. “My apologies.” He avoided her gaze again, muttering quietly. “I forget, sometimes, that this deception could not have been easy for you these past few months. The burden is my own. It was never my intention to share it. At least, not until the time was right.”

“So you really meant to tell me? Eventually?” she asked softly.

“I did. Once it was clear that you and I were...” He hesitated, his brow furrowing as he searched for the appropriate word. “... entangled. I knew I owed you an explanation, eventually.”

“And how did you expect me to react to something like that?” She couldn't help but sound pained, swallowing the tightness in her throat. “You had to have known... At the very beginning, you had to have-”

“I had hoped things could be different,” he said quietly, keeping his eyes down as he released her hand. She paused, waiting, but he did not elaborate further.

Isii eyed Morrigan. The witch stood at a distance, her hands on her hips as she frowned at a carved pillar, mouthing out the words as she struggled to translate. “Do you think she understood you earlier, when you spoke to the Sentinels? They called you one of their own-”

“Doubtful,” he said, keeping his voice low. “She has offered to assist me with translations in the past. While she knows more Elvhen than most, she is not fluent. Still,” he added, “it would be wise to use caution around her.”

“Find anything of use, Lady Morrigan?” Dorian asked as he casually strolled closer to the pillar where the Witch of the Wilds stood. “I would certainly like to know that our little stay here has not been a total loss.”

“From what I see here, it appears Solas was right,” she began slowly. “The Well of Sorrows promises a wealth of power, to those worthy of it. A remnant of the ancients that may prove



completely unique in this world. Certainly worthy of obtaining.”

“I would not be quick in making that assumption,” Fen’Harel said sharply, raising his voice.

Morrigan glanced at him, her brows raised. “Legends walked Thedas, once. Things of might and wonder. Their passing has left us all the lesser.”

“I assure you, that is a lecture I do not require, Lady Morrigan,” he said stiffly.

“Corypheus would squander the ancient power of the Well. I would have it restored. Mankind blunders through the world, crushing what it does not understand: elves, dragons, magic... the list is endless.”

“True.”

“We must therefore stem the tide or be left with nothing more than the mundane.”

“Your mistake is in assuming that you should be the one to possess it,” he corrected. “That any one person should have that kind of claim over what was lost. Do you truly pretend to understand what the Vir’Abelasan is? Or would you claim its power for your own ends blindly, simply for the sake of making it yours?”

“From what I can translate here,” she said, gesturing to the pillar, “the meaning is plain enough. It says a great boon is given to those who use the Well of Sorrows. If given the opportunity to preserve what would otherwise be lost, I would gladly pay any cost.”

“Some costs are far too high to bear.”

She looked ready to retort when a group of Sentinels descended the large staircase at the end of the courtyard. They were heavily armed, their expressions grim. Isii rose to her feet, the others gathering as she met their approach. The elf who led them seemed to have little interest in her, his eyes instead focusing on the Dread Wolf.

“You will follow us.”

Without another word, he turned. The other guards flanked them. Isii cast a brief look to Fen’Harel who nodded.

She took a steady breath and obeyed.

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“Venavis.”

The voice that stopped them was firm. Commanding. The grand, multi-story room rang with the sound of it, an echo that made the place feel hauntingly empty. The elf who spoke stood on a balcony above them, overlooking her group with a stern and suspicious scowl, his arms crossed tightly against his chest. She supposed he was their leader, the rajelan the Sentinel had referred to earlier.

Isii stepped forward, bowing her head respectfully. “*Greetings,*” she began in Elvhen. “*I am Isi’i’vhenana Sashashirelana Lavellan, leader of the Inquisition. It is good to see our people still remain in this sacred place-*”

“*Our people?*” he cut her off with a sneer, speaking in Common. “You may bear the features of

those who call themselves Elvhen, but do not presume to think of yourself as one of our own. You are a shadow bearing the shape but not the soul. You are not one of *my* people.”

She looked as though she'd been physically struck by his words, her eyes widening in shock before she glared. “How dare you-”

“Inquisitor.”

Fen'Harel spoke in a low, warning tone. She glanced back to him briefly as he gave a subtle shake of his head. She clenched her jaw, nearly biting into her cheek as she turned her attention once more to the elvhen leader. “We do not mean you any offense,” she began tensely. “We've come here to-”

“I know what you seek,” he replied. “Like all who have come before, you wish to drink from the Vir'Abelasan.” His eyes narrowed. “It is not for you,” he said, a note of danger in his tone. “It is not for any of you. You should not have come here.”

The sound of tensing bowstrings crept up the back of her neck. She could hear her own people readying their weapons, but she raised a hand to them. “Wait,” she said, keeping her eyes on the elf above them. “We do not want to fight you. You are here to protect this temple, are you not?”

“We are Sentinels, tasked with standing against those who trespass on sacred ground,” he said flatly. “Trespassers such as you.”

“So you're elves from ancient times?” Dorian said, awestruck. “Before the Tevinter Imperium destroyed Arlathan?”

“The shemlen did not destroy Arlathan,” he answered. “We elvhen warred upon ourselves. By the time the doors to this sanctuary closed, our time was over.”

Dorian's brows lifted. “Wait, that's not right! What are you saying?”

“You would not know truth,” the elf snapped. “Shemlen history is as short as the pool of your years.”

“What did the Imperium do, then?” Dorian pressed.

Isii shot a nervous glance to him. “Dorian-”

“Are you saying there wasn't a war?” he finished.

“The war of carrion feasting upon a corpse, yes. But nothing more,” he said, lifting his chin. “And you have invaded our sanctum, just as those that call themselves conquerors. You deserve no better treatment, even with your escort.” Isii's stomach jumped as the elf gestured to his men, her hand slipping behind her reflexively to grip her staff.

“*Violence is not needed, Amelan.*” Isii glanced back to Fen'Harel as he addressed the Sentinel leader in Elvhen. The man's face twisted in mild confusion as his attention fixed upon the Dread Wolf.

“*That has not been my name for many ages,*” he corrected firmly. “*Not since word of her death reached this temple. I am called Abelas, to mark her passing.*”

The Dread Wolf stepped forward. Though his demeanor was calm, he instinctively placed himself in front of Isii. Whether to shield her or to speak for her - she could not say. She saw him cast a

cautious glance toward Morrigan as he chose his words carefully. *"We each have held titles we've abandoned over time,"* he said. Isii watched Abelas's confusion melt into something else altogether - a strained look of recognition that then settled into something cold and distant. Fen'Harel raised his hand quickly before the elf could respond. *"My associates do not know me as I was before. I would prefer we keep it that way."* Isii shot a worried look to Morrigan. The witch appeared confused, though not particularly alarmed. She prayed that was a good sign.

*"We share the same goal, Abelas,"* the Dread Wolf continued. *"Our enemies approach this temple. We have come to guarantee that the Well does not fall into their hands. Perhaps in a more... private setting... we may discuss this further?"*

Abelas did not appear pleased. He stood a moment in silent contemplation before gesturing to his men. *"Stand down."* His attention then turned to Fen'Harel, his words slipping back into Common. "The rest of your group will stay here, under guard."

"And you guarantee their safety?" the Dread Wolf asked.

"Wait," Dorian said, alarmed, "they're splitting us up? Is that wise?"

Abelas's gaze didn't waver, continuing as if Dorian wasn't even there. "They will be watched, but they will not be harmed - assuming they do as they are told and stay here."

Isii could feel her pulse in her stomach. Something didn't feel right about this. "He's not leaving without me," she said firmly.

Abelas fixed his eyes on her. Though he was glaring, she thought she saw the faintest glimmer of dismissive amusement beneath his annoyance. "I do not recall asking your permission."

Fen'Harel turned to look at her over his shoulder. "Inquisitor, I know what I am doing," he said softly.

"And we're supposed to do.... what?" Sera asked. "Sit on our hands while Solas goes and has a chat?"

"You will not be harmed," Fen'Harel said firmly. "Abelas has given his word."

Sera's lips curled back. "Well good for Dusty Butt," she muttered, unconvinced.

## Chapter End Notes

Translations:

dian, shemlen - stop, mortal

tel'josha - stop moving

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Solas referring to Abelas as Amelan is a call-back to my fic [Var Hellathen](#).

I originally thought I could finish off the Temple of Mythal mission in this chapter, but it felt like it was getting overly long. So enjoy this update while I \*hopefully\* finish things up for the Vir Abelasan in the next installment.



## Chapter 16

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“So,” Abelas said sharply as the doors shut behind him, reverberating across the stone of the small room. “You deceive those you count among your allies. Forgive me if I do not find this surprising.”

Fen’Harel watched the elf, a cautious tension in his gaze as he tucked his hands behind his back. “The woman who leads them knows my identity. It suits my purposes to leave it at that.”

“It is certainly a convincing disguise,” he said flatly. “I would not have recognized you easily.”

Fen’Harel fixed his gaze firmly on the sentinel. “There is an army coming, Abelas. Their leader is intent on tearing this world apart in his pursuit of power.”

The man sneered. “So once again, we are to defend against a force you led to our doorstep?”

“I have not led them here,” he corrected quickly. “I learned of their plan and hope to circumvent it. We have thought of our own countermeasures. Assuming all goes well, you and your men will never be endangered. However, if we fail in our attempts to stop their forces, we *must* ensure that the Well cannot fall into their possession.”

“My men and I will continue to defend this place,” Abelas said. “We have sworn our lives to see this temple protected.”

“And how many of you remain after all this time?” The elf stared back at him, his hardened expression unmoving. Fen’Harel took a slow breath, his gaze falling. “You cannot defeat an army. Even if you survive the first wave of attack, I can guarantee there will be others. Corypheus will not stop until the Well is his.”

“What, then?” he asked. “Are we to simply stand aside and relinquish the Well to one of these mortals you’ve brought here?”

Fen’Harel’s lips parted, a denial ready on his tongue, but he paused. “That is not my decision to make.”

Abelas’s brow furrowed. “Then whose is it?” A brief look of clarity only made his confusion deepen. “Do you mean to tell me you would leave it in the hands of that woman? The one who tried to speak for you?”

“She is their leader,” he said simply. “I follow her just as they do.”

“She is a child!” Abelas said in disbelief.

“I have told her that the Well must be destroyed,” Fen’Harel said, shaking his head.

“And did she agree?” The Dread Wolf said nothing. “You would allow yourself to be commanded by some shemlen?”

“I trust that she will make the right decision.”

The Dread Wolf wished he felt as confident as he sounded.

Abelas stared back at him, seemingly at a loss for words. He could not understand. Of course he couldn't. A year ago, Fen'Harel would have shared his perspective; that Isii wasn't even real. She was a mere shadow of what she could have been, what she *should* have been, if he had not created this world in which someone like her could exist. But he knew if he had the Well destroyed against her will, if he took that choice from her, whatever small amount of trust that laid between them would be abandoned. He could not afford to lose that now. Not while Corypheus was still a threat. Not while his past mistakes could lead to her death.

Fen'Harel hoped she would listen to him before it was too late.

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"I am willing to pay the price the Well demands," Morrigan said firmly. "I am also the best suited to use its knowledge in your service."

"Or more likely to your own ends," Fen'Harel muttered.

The witch's eyes narrowed on him. "What do you know of my ends, elf?"

"You are a glutton drooling at the sight of a feast," he snapped. "You cannot be trusted."

"Why should I be refused when the reasons behind it are sound?"

Isii's eyes flicked between the two of them before returning to the reflective pool in front of her. Moonlight danced across its surface, stars dotting it as if it held the very universe within its depths. As beautiful as it was, it seemed so - simple. So plain, for something supposedly so dangerous and powerful in equal measure. But there was an aura here. She could feel it - a pulling, gnawing sense that tugged on her limbs, trying to draw her closer.

The Well felt hungry.

"Inquisitor, please," Morrigan pressed. "Of those present, I alone have the training to make use of this. Let me drink."

"You alone?" Isii asked incredulously. "This is my heritage!"

"I have studied the oldest lore. I have delved into mysteries of which you could only dream."

"I highly doubt that," she retorted.

The witch's hands settled on her hips. "And what expertise did the Dalish give you, exactly? You knew even less about this temple than I did, let alone the power it contained. Can you honestly tell me there is anyone better suited?"

"It's not as if you're the only one here who has studied the arcane," Dorian chided.

"And would you have it for yourself, then?"

Dorian's brow lifted. "A human from Tevinter scoops up the last bits of Elvhen knowledge?" He shook his head. "I can't be that man. But Isii certainly has just as much of a right to it as any elf. Or Solas--"

"No," Fen'Harel answered firmly.

The Tevinter frowned. "With your knowledge of the ancient world, you are more than capable of--"

“No,” he said again through clenched teeth. “Do not ask me again.”

“Right, so,” Sera began, her nose scrunching. “Never thought I’d say this, but Solas is right. It’s called the Well of Sorrows. Sorrows, yeah? No one should go in the *Well. Of. Sorrows.*”

“If anyone is going to take it, it’s me,” Isii said, her brow tightening. “This belongs to the People, not to some shem.”

“You are a shemlen, just as the rest of your lot,” Abelas said firmly. The elf continued to glare at her, staring with the same level of cold scrutiny he had since emerging from his private meeting with the Dread Wolf. He’d said little since, silent as he led them through the temple, his displeasure seemingly growing with each step. “Do you even know what this is? The Vir’Abelasan is far too much for a mortal to comprehend. Brave it if you must, but know this: you shall be bound forever to the will of Mythal.”

“Bound?” Morrigan asked derisively. “To a goddess who no longer exists, if she ever did?”

“I thought Mythal was locked away with the others,” Isii said warily. “The Dread Wolf-”

“The Dread Wolf had nothing to do with her murder,” Abelas snapped quickly.

Isii searched Fen’Harel’s face warily, but his features told her nothing. Morrigan’s brow lifted. “Murder? We said nothing of-”

“She was slain,” Abelas explained tersely, “if a god truly can be. Betrayed by those who destroyed this temple. Yet the Vir’Abelasan remains. As do we.” His gaze shifted to the Dread Wolf, his expression softening somewhat. “That, at least, is something.”

“You do not need to remain bound to her service, Abelas,” Fen’Harel said. “You have fulfilled an obligation far greater than what should have ever been asked of you. Your markings -”

“Will remain as they are,” the sentinel said firmly, cutting off the unspoken offer. “We do not wish to forget our purpose - even as we leave this place.”

“You could stay,” Isii said. “Fight with us. Corypheus is a threat that could destroy the entire world-”

“The world was destroyed long ago, shem.” The intensity of his tone faded, leaving only a wistful fatigue.

“There are other places, friend,” Fen’Harel coaxed. “Other duties. Your people yet linger. Corypheus takes precedent. But after his defeat..”

He did not finish his statement, allowing it to hang loosely - yet even without completion, the elf understood. Abelas considered for a moment, a tired calm falling over his features as he nodded. “Perhaps there are places the shemlen have not touched. It may be that only uthenera awaits us. The blissful sleep of eternity, never to awaken. If fate is kind.” He shook his head, as if disbelieving the validity of whatever faint hope he clung to. “Once the matter of the Well is settled, there is no reason to remain.”

Isii’s gaze returned to the Well. The surface of the pool was calm, stirred only slightly by the faint breezes that skimmed along small ripples of moonlight. Those waters contained everything she had ever dreamed of. The knowledge of her people. Their history. Their wisdom. Yet there was a strange sense of menace there, too. Something unspoken. Something she could feel in her gut - a stirring that left her with an overwhelming yet vague uncertainty.

Bull cleared his throat. "Any chance this Well could help you against Corypheus... I say you take it, Boss."

Isii took a deep breath as she stared into the Well. "We have to do whatever it takes to win, don't we? I'm the Inquisitor. It's my responsibility to take any risks involved."

"So you would take what *little* knowledge you can understand and let the rest go to waste?" Morrigan huffed.

Isii frowned. "Who says it will go to waste?"

"*I do,*" the witch stressed.

Isii took a tentative step forward, jumping slightly as she felt the warmth of fingers wrapping firmly around her wrist. She turned to meet the Dread Wolf's eyes, his expression strained.

"Inquisitor, *please*," Fen'Harel pleaded, his voice low. "Even if you do not trust me, I beg of you. Do not do this."

She searched his face, the earnestness of his distress written plainly on his features. She frowned. "You would throw away all of this knowledge... everything that remains from before... Do you truly want to see it destroyed?"

"Destroyed?" Morrigan echoed derisively. "You would have your people's legacy burned away without a second thought?!"

The Dread Wolf's eyes never left her own, unwavering as his grip on her wrist tightened. "You would be bound to Mythal," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Do not take that warning lightly. You do not understand the consequences, what it means to be held under the will of another."

"Bound to the will of a *dead* god?" Morrigan said flatly. "It's an empty warning. Cower all you will, Solas. I am not afraid to face it."

"*It is not for you,*" he snapped, glaring at the woman before returning his gaze. "Isii, please. This is all I will ask of you. Do not take from the Well."

Isii paused, studying him in the silence that followed. He looked genuinely frightened in that moment. Though she couldn't understand that fear, there was no denying its presence.

A *god* was begging her not to act. The Dread Wolf himself was pleading for her to listen to him. Not commanding. Not forcing. He had the power to - of that, she was certain, and the weight of that realization pooled in her belly.

Her eyes shifted to Abelas; the elf stood, watching the exchange, his expression difficult to read. "You've protected the Vir'Abelasan for thousands of years," she said. "You know better than anyone how valuable it is." He nodded solemnly. "What would you have me do?"

His brow quirked, arching as his gaze shifted between the two of them - seemingly surprised that she would ask for his input. "The Well was meant for the faithful - for those who Mythal deemed worthy of it. I would see it destroyed rather than allowing it to be twisted from that purpose."

"Elfy elves don't want *normal* people near their precious Well, yeah?" Sera muttered. "Still... this is scary demon stuff. Do you really want in on that?"



Isii looked back to Fen'Harel, slowly pulling her arm from his grasp. "We can't allow the Well to fall into Corypheus's hands," she said. "If you truly think-

"I do," the Dread Wolf said firmly. "This is what must be done."

"You fool!" Morrigan spat. "Can we afford to lose such a powerful asset at a time like this?!"

"Morrigan-

"You lead the Inquisition," she pressed, cutting Isii off. "This is not a risk you can take. But *I can*. Let me drink."

"It all seems rather ghoulish, don't you think?" Dorian said. "Let Morrigan use it, if she wants it so much."

"To restore lost knowledge, I would risk much," the witch continued. "Give me this and I will fight at your side. I will be your sword. I would use this knowledge to your benefit."

"You do not even know what you are asking for," Fen'Harel said, shaking his head. "Are you so blinded by the promise of power that you do not even consider that it comes at a price?"

"Would you have me paralyze myself for fear of what might be?" she asked. "If some compulsion remains, as vague as that notion may be, I am willing to bear it."

Isii let out a slow breath, turning her eyes to the Well once more. All of that history. All of the promises that it held -

"We shouldn't go wandering blindly into a ritual we do not understand," she said solemnly. "I would not have you take that risk, even if it aided the Inquisition."

"Inquisitor-

"Destroy it, then," Isii muttered quietly. "Just get it over with."

The Dread Wolf nodded to the sentinel, the elf's armor clinking softly against the stone as he approached. Abelas raised his hands, stretching them out toward the pool, the Veil trembling as his eyes began to glow - an eerie haze of blue cutting through the black smoke that curled around his ashen cheeks. Darkness descended over the water as it began to stir, churning with a startling hum as its surface ignited. The smoke thickened, tendrils falling from his fingertips, encircling beams of white light, descending into inky spirals as it pierced the water's surface.

A sudden movement caught Isii's eye and she turned in time to see Morrigan lunge toward the elf. Her hand was raised, a small blade glinting in the pale moonlight. The Inquisitor barely had time to draw breath, to call out to her before she was deafened by a crackling blast, a rush of force passing harmlessly over her as it barrelled toward the witch. Fen'Harel was advancing even before the woman fell, letting out a startled shriek as her body crashed hard into the ground. Abelas turned quickly as his spell dissipated, his eyes wide.

"Does human greed truly know no bounds?" the Dread Wolf bellowed, barrelling towards her.

"How dare you?" Morrigan snarled, pushing herself to her feet. Her hands tensed, the first sparks of a spell barely summoned to her fingertips before Fen'Harel's eyes flashed, an unseen wave causing her boots to skitter uselessly against the stone until her back hit the wall of the enclosure.

"Solas-

“You are no better than a child envious for a toy!” he shouted over Isii’s objection, his eyes fixed on Morrigan as she struggled to move. “You would kill this man in pursuit of power you do not even comprehend?! The Well is not some tool you can hope to master!”

“Solas, *stop* .”

His eyes met her own, the fierceness of his anger carved deep into his features. He studied the Inquisitor before returning his gaze to the witch, a chilling calm settling over his expression. “You wish to know what the Vir’Abelasan holds?” He released his spell, her body slumping away from the wall as she staggered back onto her feet. “Dirthara ma.”

Morrigan watched him warily as she straightened her posture, her chin lifting. She approached the Well, glaring as the Dread Wolf stepped aside.

“You said it should be destroyed,” Isii snapped, frowning.

“If she is willing to spill blood for it, she is more than worthy of the consequences,” Fen’Harel answered sharply.

“I would not see your meaningless superstition destroy something so irreplaceable, Solas,” Morrigan said haughtily, walking briskly toward the edge of the reflective pool. She paused for only a moment before slowly wading toward its center, the height of the water creeping gradually up toward her waist. The Vir’Abelasan welcomed her, humming into life, thin wisps of light skirting along her limbs as she moved deeper.

Within moments, it was done.

Fen’Harel stalked away without another word.

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The Dread Wolf sought his solitude in a small room just beyond the inner sanctum. It once served as a place of prayer - a small space with little more than an altar for those seeking solace within the vast grandeur of Mythal’s temple. The walls still glittered with the extravagance so sought after by his kind, despite its more humble purpose. Murals of gold-encrusted dragons promised both protection and fury for the faithful, embedded with enough jewels that none could question the majesty and glory of the All-Mother.

He knew she would find him eventually. Fen’Harel did not move when he heard the doors open behind him, bracing his weight on his hands where they pressed to the altar’s edge. His head hung low, his shoulders tense as her footsteps approached, the heavy weight of the entrance falling closed once more.

“What in the Void was that, Fen’Harel?” Isii snapped. “You tell me to destroy the Well, only to give it to a *shem* ? To *Morrigan*, of all people - someone you don’t even like, let alone trust?”

He didn’t respond, not even turning to acknowledge her.

“What is it, then?” she pressed. “Is it really that dangerous, or do you not trust me enough to have that kind of power? I already have your anchor. Haven’t I proven to you that I would only use something like this to help people?”

The Dread Wolf remained silent, his eyes closing.

“The mark was an accident. You never wanted me to have this. You would probably take it from

me if you could.”

“I can,” he said quietly. “And I would, if our circumstances were different.” He turned only slightly, glancing over his shoulder before his head hung forward once more. “What’s done is done. Morrigan has had her wish fulfilled. She only has herself to blame for what comes next.” He let out a slow breath as Isii drew closer. “The binding to Mythal is permanent. Whether she knows it or not, every action she takes, every thought that crosses her mind - any one of them could be the result of Mythal’s influence. Morrigan is her puppet now, if she so chooses to use the hold she has over her.”

“But I thought Mythal was dead.”

His fingertips paled as his hands tensed against the stone. Memories of the blow that killed her were still fresh in his mind - the lifeless weight of her body as he pulled her through the Eluvian, the feeling of her spirit moving within him as her body grew cold. “She was murdered,” he said, “but Mythal endures. My kind are not so easily eradicated.”

“You knew this and yet you still allowed Morrigan to accept that fate?” Isii asked, her brow furrowing.

“Yes,” he said darkly. “I did.” His gaze shifted to her as he turned, his jaw set into a tight grimace. “Is that not what you expect of me, Inquisitor?” he asked, his voice sharpening bitterly. “That is what I am, after all, isn’t it? A villain? I should think by your standards of me, this is a minor and petty infraction. I am capable of so much worse, am I not? If I truly wished to punish her, I could have been far more creative. Poisoning her mind. Terrorizing her dreams. Turning into a beast and swallowing up her child. Is that not what you expect from the Dread Wolf?” He winced at his own words, shaking his head. “It was not a lack of trust that made me deny you the Vir’Abelasan. You can continue to hate me as you wish. That will not change the fact that I would do whatever I had to in order to keep you from being enslaved.”

Isii stared back at him, seemingly at a loss for words. He lowered his gaze, letting out a slow and tired breath. “Mythal was dear to me. I owe her my life. Yet even if she asked me to repay that debt by seeing you given to her service, I would not do it.” His eyes met her own once more. Her brow creased as she studied his face with the same wariness that was now so familiar to him. He reached a tentative hand forward, his fingertips brushing a strand of her hair back, half expecting her to flinch away.

She did not.

“Mythal would not be worthy of you, Isii. None of my kind would be.” His hand settled on her cheek, cupping his palm to the warmth of her skin. “Not even me,” he added quietly.

Isii remained silent for a breathless moment, her eyes shifting over his features as some of the tension eased from her brow. He let his hand slip away from her, surprised as she caught him by the wrist. He watched her curiously as her lips parted, waiting for her to speak. Whatever words she wanted fled her, her eyes darting uncertainly before she hesitantly pulled him towards her, bringing her lips to his own.

Fen’Harel froze. It was barely a kiss, little more than a brush against skin before she pulled back, looking up at him.

Even a gesture so small made his chest tighten, the subtle promise hidden away in her kiss making his heart quicken. She didn’t resist when his fingertips tilted her chin upward, her mouth yielding to his own as he cautiously closed the distance once more, pressing his lips to hers fully in a longer,

lingering caress. She released his wrist as his hands slid along her sides, warily pulling until she moved her body closer to his. He moaned softly as she did, a sigh of relief escaping him as her arms encircled his shoulders, pressing her chest to his own. He took only what she gave, his tongue eager to the invitation of parting lips as he felt her apprehension give way in his arms. She whimpered as he tasted her, the soft sounds of her pleasure only driving him further, his hands burying themselves in her hair as her own gripped the front of his robes, fingers digging into fur. The kiss soon changed into something artless, desperate, something he didn't fully understand as they both reached for what they had been missing, searching skin to find the connection they had lost.

He could not say if she had pulled him or if it was the neediness of his embrace that turned her until the altar pressed against the back of her thighs, but he relished feeling the weight of his body against her own. One leg hitched to his side, then another, his hands moving to accommodate as she pulled herself up along his body, soon perched to the edge of the carved stone. She nipped at his lips, breathless as her thighs embraced him, eliminating whatever small space existed between them as his arms tightened around her. It had been too long, far too long, and even though he did not understand what motivated her he would not question it. He would take whatever affection she offered and give her anything she demanded in return.

He parted for breath as a necessity only, fearing the moment his lips left hers that it would end whatever madness had sparked this- that her senses would return and he could only watch her recede from him once more. Instead her lips moved to his throat, one hand tugging at his collar to expose his skin, the other pulling at the jawbone around his neck as her teeth scraped and then bit, hard, hard enough to draw a cry from him, shuddering as she sucked, her tongue laving against the ache.

“Isii-”

She stopped his words, smothering an unspoken question as she took his mouth again hungrily, gripping him tightly as her tongue flicked past his lips. He could do little more than moan, his fingers digging into her hips as she squirmed against him. He felt the latch of his belt give as she flicked it open, her hands quickly diving beneath his robes, her nails dragging against the thinner material of his tunic. His own hands made a similar search, fingertips drawing circles on bare skin beneath the hem of her jacket, casting as he caressed the small of her back. He could feel her tremble against him, a surprised gasp against his lips as his magic sank into her followed quickly by a deep groan.

“Inquisitor?”

The witch's shrill and impatient tone echoed in the room beyond. Isii's lips parted from his own but she lingered, hesitating only a small breath away. He kissed her again and she sank into it, whimpering.

“Inquisitor!”

Morrigan's voice was more insistent, seemingly intent on finding where their leader had disappeared to. Isii drew her mouth away but he quickly cupped her jaw, his brow pressed to her own.

“Stay,” he breathed in a pleading whisper, panting softly against her lips.

He knew that she wouldn't, even before she pulled back to look into his face. The Dread Wolf offered no resistance as she pushed against his shoulders, untangling herself from him far enough that she could slip back down onto her feet. She paused but said nothing, her gaze falling as she

straightened her clothing, brushing past him before her steps echoed further into the temple beyond.

She left a god in her wake in much the way she found him, his hands braced to the altar as his head hung low, leaving only the taste of her on his lips as he tried to steady his breathing.

## Chapter End Notes

Translation:

dirthara ma - ancient elvhen curse. "may you learn"

So, not sure if you're all aware, but if Abelas tries to actively destroy the Well in-game, Morrigan straight-up shanks him. I wasn't really pleased that there was virtually no response if she did so - hence the way this scene plays out.

# Chapter 17

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Arbor Wilds were hot, the air humid and buzzing with a particularly troublesome insect that seemed intent on leaving one's skin prickling with irritating bites.

Vivienne hated it.

It would be crude to show her irritation, of course. She would not allow her visage to be conquered by discomfort. But the long hours spent on their journey to this place, escorted by a contingent of Inquisition soldiers, left her eagerly anticipating their departure. A battlefield was not, by any means, her ideal choice of location - but her dedication to the cause demanded it.

Besides, it did offer its own advantages.

The Empress maintained her grace even within their savage surroundings. Despite the coach that had likely carried her through most of the distance from Val Royeaux, Celene had ridden on horseback at the head of her troops for their rendezvous with the Inquisition's forces, donned in regal plate armor. She was unmasked on account of her helm, but her status was clearly displayed by the silverite plate secured with the finest drakeskin, filigreed and touched with gold, the masked heraldry of Orlais paired with the fearsome lion of House Valmont upon her breast.

It was all for show, of course. Everyone knew it was merely ceremonial and likely far too heavy for practical use. Still, appearances were always carefully crafted in Orlais. Their Empress was leading her men into battle. It was only fitting that she dressed the part.

Vivienne shared some minor pleasantries with Celene, swallowing her annoyance as the Empress's attention was drawn away by Leliana. Opportunities for such direct discourse were fleeting, even with her position in court, so she was less than enthusiastic to have the moment taken from her so swiftly. Still, they were here for matters of war and the two women were quickly drawn into a discussion of strategy and troop placements. When Celene requested a moment to speak with the Inquisitor, Leliana looked to Vivienne expectantly.

She hid a tight breath behind her smile.

She supposed she could fetch the little elf.

Of course Isii would not make the task simple for her. After searching their encampment and pointedly interrogating some of her fellow companions, Vivienne found herself wandering an ill-worn path into the jungle's outskirts on word that their famed leader had been seen disappearing in that direction a short time ago.

She spotted the Inquisitor in a small clearing having what appeared to be a rather tense conversation with Solas.

"I've been waiting for a chance to speak to you alone. About us. The other day-"

"Now's not the time for this," Isii objected. "Scouts spotted their approach. It won't be long before-"

"I know," he said. "I do not want to sway your focus. I simply wish to understand what that was. If

anything has changed between us.”

“Isn’t that obvious?” Isii asked, her expression strained. She shook her head, her gaze falling at she chewed on her lip. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have left things the way I did. You want a simple answer and I can’t give you one. Not now.” She lifted her chin. “We will talk. After. I promise.” The confidence of her tone seemed to slip as she cast her gaze aside. “Assuming there is an after.”

“There will be.” Solas took a step closer, his hand going to her shoulder. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Her lips shifted, halfway to a smile. “I suppose having you on my side does even the odds out a bit.”

Vivienne cleared her throat loudly, drawing the elves attention, both seemingly startled by her presence as she approached. She put on a pleasant smile. “Isii, my dear, Empress Celene has requested an audience with you. It simply would not do to keep her waiting long.”

The Inquisitor’s eyes shifted briefly to Solas before she nodded, turning wordlessly as she took to the path leading back to their camp. Vivienne’s arms crossed smoothly across her chest as she studied the lone apostate before her. “I confess, Solas, I expected you to be back at the Temple of Mythal. Lady Morrigan has told me that some powerful magic yet remains there. Assuming it can be trusted.”

He seemed irritated by the intrusion, though it played out in little more than a simple pursing of his lips. “For once, we agree. Many relics were lost for good reason.”

“I would think the temptation would be too great for someone such as yourself,” she said pointedly. “A hidden temple, full of secrets - something far more tangible than your journeys into the Fade.”

“The power at the Temple of Mythal is tangible, yes. But also potent and far too easy to misuse.”

“Then we are not so different after all, my dear apostate. We both believe magic must be limited safely.”

“Only a fool would ignore such a stark reminder of the destruction of an empire,” Solas answered. “We may disagree on many things, Enchanter. But neither of us is a fool.”

Vivienne merely chuckled. “Oh you are too kind,” she said, the subtlety of her sarcasm not lost on him. She glanced over her shoulder down the trail Isii had taken. “I see you have made your attempts to renew your favor with our Inquisitor.” Her head tilted slightly. “It must have come as quite a blow to lose your position of privilege at her side after cultivating it so carefully.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. “All due respect, Madame de Fer, but I would not comment on that which you do not understand.”

Her brows lifted with feigned interest. “And what is there precisely that I do not understand? You are an apostate within a Chantry-affiliated organization with very little to safeguard your own standing. You and I both know tenuous your position is, relying on only the charity of Cassandra and the others to keep you from finding yourself in chains when this is all over. That is what often happens to hedge mages such as yourself, unless I am mistaken.”

“The threats we face here were well worth the risk of repercussions,” he said.

“Hmm. And yet curiously you seem to have faced none,” Vivienne replied. “You and I both know that Isii would never let that happen to her lover. You would have seen that from the very

beginning. She certainly presented an appetizing opportunity for you. With the Inquisitor as your paramour, you managed to place yourself in a position of influence while securing your own freedom from the dreaded Circles you so abhor. All in a matter of months. Quite the accomplishment, wouldn't you say?"

Solas said nothing, his face drawn with hardened stoicism as he stared back at her. "Admittedly I am surprised to see an elven apostate catch onto the nature of the Game so quickly. A homeless drifter held the ear of one of the most powerful world leaders, for a time. Only a short-sighted fool would see that as a mere coincidence." She smiled again, broadly. "As you said yourself, Solas - neither one of us are fools."

"Do you have a point, Enchanter?"

"To put it in simple terms, so that you may comprehend it more readily - I'd suggest you leave the girl alone. Toying with her feelings may have worked for you before, but she deserves better than that. You played the Game well, but you should know when you've been beaten."

"Forgive me if I doubt the sincerity of your concern for Isii's wellbeing."

Vivienne laughed. "You should know by now that I don't have a single care for what you think of me or my motivations, Solas. My concern is the quality of the Inquisition's leadership. Everyone has seen the change in her behavior since whatever spat the two of you had that allowed her to see you for what you truly are." Vivienne said smoothly. "You are a distraction. One the Inquisitor does not need. You do have your uses, Solas. But do try to keep your machinations out of our leader's bedroom."

His eyes narrowed into a glare. "I don't see how my personal affairs are any of your business."

Vivienne let out a tired sigh, waving her hand dismissively. "Run along then, by all means," she said, turning as she started down the path once more. "Continue to chase after her, if you will. Perhaps if you're persistent enough in following her around like some lost pup, you'll be given another chance."

Solas made no further argument as she retraced her steps back to their encampment.

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Isii tried to block out the endless din, screams of pain and battlecries echoing over the constant shriek of metal striking metal. The trap was laid and Corypheus's men had marched straight into it, caught unawares. Yet despite their careful planning and strategizing, everything around her was a sea of deadly chaos as men and women raised their swords, each locked in a panicked struggle to simply survive the onslaught.

Orders were shouted and her forces closed in around them, cutting them off from any routes of escape. Orlais followed, creating a secondary ring, pressing further and further inward. The Red Templars had no choice but to fight and they did so with all the ferocity of caged animals. The peaceful serenity of the Arbor Wilds was offset by the savagery held within, the stench of sweat and blood filling the air as each blade met its mark, each arrow singing past until the wet thud of penetrating flesh halted its path. Their archers and mages used the terrain to their advantage, allowing the jungle to swallow them whole, the flora providing the perfect cover for their attacks as they hung to the outskirts of battle.

Isii led her group through the fray, fighting only as much as was needed to clear herself a path. She was hunting. She had to remain focused. If the Templars lost their leader, this war would be over.



She needed to kill the so-called god who led their crusade.

She spotted Corypheus on higher ground - a clearing where he had cornered himself, sneering as he cast, keeping the chaos from consuming him. Samson stood at his side, barking orders, surrounded by a small contingency of men meant guard over their divine leader.

Her targets had been located. All that was left was the kill.

Isii glanced to Cullen, the Commander keeping her stride, his shield raised.

“If you draw Samson away-”

“I will handle him myself, Inquisitor,” he finished for her, patting his belt where Dagna’s runestone swayed, clinking against his armor with each step.

Isii took a deep breath and pressed forward, running now at full speed, trying to keep the pit in her stomach from growing.

In Haven, Corypheus had nearly killed her.

She wouldn’t make that mistake again.

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“You and your men don’t know when to stop!” Samson shouted, emphasizing his words with his blade. Cullen caught the blow with his shield, the force of it shuddering through his arm. “You’ve hunted us half across Thedas. Should have expected we’d find you here.”

Cullen gritted his teeth, bracing himself for the blow that quickly followed. Luring Samson away from Corypheus had not been easy - but his rage and determination to face the Commander’s attack head-on had allowed Cullen to draw him out through strategic retreats.

“We found your base,” Cullen answered. “Your Tranquil, Maddox. You threw his life away like a coward so you could run away with your tail between your legs.”

Samson snarled, his teeth bared as he advanced again. “That was his choice. I told him not to!” *He’s angry. Good. Make this personal. It will only distract him.* “He died as one of us. One of the faithful.”

The next strike to hit his shield nearly caused Cullen’s knee to buckle out from under him, his shoulder aching from the strain. “The Chantry never knew what they were throwing away. Being force-fed lyrium was good for something. This armor makes me a living fortress - mind and body.” Samson’s lips turned into something halfway between a sneer and a grin, his armor glowing as he lifted his chin. “This is the strength the Chantry tried to bind. But it’s a new world now. With a new god. But instead of embracing that, you choose to fight like the obedient dog you always were.”

Cullen allowed himself a second to glance over to Corypheus. He’d put enough distance between them. With the added distraction of the Inquisitor’s attacks, it was safe to presume he would not intervene on the behalf of his general. Cullen lowered his shield, tearing the runestone from his belt. It began to glow as he lifted it, sparks of blinding gold flickering in a steady stream around his gauntlet. Samson’s advance halted as he staggered, letting out a startled and panicked wail as he gripped his chest. His armor’s glow pulsed in sharp bursts until it finally crested, crackling against his skin, a pained scream on his lips as he was forced to one knee. His eyes lifted quickly, fixing Cullen with a chilling glare.

“What did you do?” he snapped. “What did you do?! My armor. The lyrium. It’s gone - *I need it!*”

“You don’t,” Cullen said, advancing. Samson caught the blow with his gauntlet, struggling to rise to his feet as he lifted his sword. “You’re letting yourself be enslaved by it. There are other ways. You can let the lyrium go.”

“What, and become some self-righteous prig like you?” Samson countered, swinging. “You’re fooling yourself, *Knight-Captain*. You’re half the man you were before. The lyrium will kill us both in the end.” Their blades caught, pressed together as neither man yielded, sweat-stained skin straining against their efforts. “Consider it a parting gift from the fucking Chantry for us both.”

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“Enough!” Corypheus bellowed, dispelling another wave of magic that threatened to engulf him. “I will not stand for this outrage. If you desire death, you shall have it!”

His hands extended, clawed fingers curling around the orb, long streams of crackling red lightning spilling onto the field. Cassandra and Blackwall were ill-prepared, their shields doing little to block the force of the blow as it knocked them off of their feet. Fen’Harel moved quickly, hand extended as he cast a barrier, a solid wall of force glimmering in front of their ranged fighters for only a moment before the sharp sizzle of the magister’s magic struck it.

Isii shot a look to the Dread Wolf, his eyes glowing as he fixed them onto Corypheus. His focus was strained, his brow furrowing as the magister writhed. Isii couldn’t see the source of his pain until the grey swaths began to creep along his form, the magister’s body stiffening as his very limbs seemed to be transforming into stone.

“He is resisting,” Fen’Harel shouted over the din of battle. “Take him, now, while I slow him down.”

“You think to best me with your feeble magic?” Corypheus shot back, infuriated as his arms contorted, straining against the force of the Dread Wolf’s spell as he took a staggering step forward. “I shall wear your ears as a trophy when this is done, rattus!”

“Everything you’ve got! *Now!*” Isii yelled, lightning sparking along her staff before she unleashed it. The others obeyed, arrows and magic singing through the air, pelting the magister as his barrier gave way. Cassandra and Blackwall advanced once more, Bull running up from behind as he let his ax swing, sinking into Corypheus’s back. He howled in pain, his spine arching in response, summoning another blast. The energy surged along his arms, glowing and red as Cole suddenly appeared at his side, his daggers moving quickly as they caught him in the ribs, disappearing before the would-be god could retaliate. As he twisted, his arm swiping to strike the spirit, Cassandra’s sword plunged into his exposed side. An arrow sunk into the magister’s eye, Sera’s self-congratulating cheer drowned out by the man’s screams as he clutched his face.

“Dorian. Vivienne. *Fire.*” The words came quickly as Isii summoned flames into her staff. “Everyone else get back.”

The coordinated attack soared through Fen’Harel’s protective barrier, fire consuming his form as Corypheus collapsed, his body spasming under the heat. His flesh seared, the stench of it turning her stomach as Isii watched the man writhe, a smile pulling at her lips.

They had him.

Corypheus’s resistance gave way, the Dread Wolf’s spell consuming him wholly, cracks of burning

light sealing beneath a sheath of hard, unforgiving stone. “*Fools,*” he choked out with a laugh, the menacing sound bubbling from his throat until it was finally silenced, his body lying still before them.

It was over.

The battle raged on in the distance, but she knew it was over. They had won.

Corypheus was dead.

The few men left standing from his personal guard halted, horrified eyes turning toward their fallen god. Their surrender was swift.

Isii paused to catch her breath as the Dread Wolf let the barrier fall, swift steps taking him to the magister’s side. She followed as he knelt, inspecting the petrified fingers that curled around his orb.

“Might take a little work chipping away the stone to extract it,” she hummed, breathlessly laughing. “Unless of course you want to keep the hand as a souvenir.”

He chuckled softly at that, his gaze turning to meet her own. He rose to his feet quickly, impulsively pulling her closer as his head bent to meet her own. The kiss was quick, rushed, full of elation as she stiffened in his grasp, a surprised whimper on her lips before he pulled back. He was grinning broadly, his admiration laid bare. “You did it,” he murmured.

“*We* did it,” she reminded him, smiling as his hand settled on the back of her neck. “And survived, which is a bonus.”

“You have no idea how much this means to me,” he said, his forehead pressing to her own. He seemed so happy then, so relieved that she couldn’t help but feel warmed by the gesture. “I was beginning to doubt-”

“Inquisitor!”

The panicked shout drew her attention, forcing her to turn from his grasp as a roaring, gurgling groan soon followed. She stared back in horror as one of Corypheus’s men fell to his knees, his body shuddering in pain as blackened tar spilled from his lips, falling across his Warden armor. Her people backed away as his skin began to turn, mutating, dark veins curling over his cheeks. She felt Fen’Harel’s arm move to her waist, pulling as he placed himself in front of her, his look as puzzled as her own as the man’s body contorted, skin black as pitch as his bones cracked, growing, reshaping. His eyes opened, replaced by hollow red orbs that glowed as they fixed themselves on her, his frame rising as he lurched to his feet.

Isii froze in terror as the figure stood before her, the metamorphosed face of Corypheus glaring at her through the blighted tar that dripped from his form.

*No. It can’t be-*

Corypheus lashed out, grasping the soldier closest to him, the man’s body ripped open by taloned fingers before he could fight back. The magister summoned, drawing the man’s blood out as her companions leapt into action, attempting to attack him before he could finish forming his spell. Blood billowed, suspended in the air like a cloud of rust before it hardened into shards, spilling out in a sudden burst that sent them flying through the air in all directions.

The force of the blast knocked her off of her feet, Fen’Harel’s body crashing into hers as shards of

bladed blood cut into their skin. Isii could hear shouting, her head ringing as something tightened around her throat, her body being pulled roughly into the air. Her eyes snapped open as Corypheus's face hung inches from her own, his clawed hand clamped around her neck as she felt herself hurtling backward, the magister force-stepping in a haze of red.

"You think you can best me so easily?!" he shouted, rage burning in his eyes as his hand tightened around her throat. She could hear the roaring of her pulse in her ears, nearly drowning out the shouts around her as he squeezed. Her mouth dropped open, desperately trying to suck in air as his lips peeled back, sneering. "You have been most successful in foiling my plans - but let us not forget what you are. A thief at the wrong place, at the wrong time. An interloper. *A gnat.*" Isii could hear the screaming shriek of his dragon overhead, the rumble of it landing, the shouts of her followers scrambling to respond, but she could focus on little more than his face as her legs kicked, dangling uselessly as her nails clawed at the hand that held her. The blight oozed from his skin, the sickening trickle dripping down her neck as her lungs burned. His free hand extended, reaching out toward the stone effigy of his fallen form, the orb glowing as his former fingers shattered, crumbling to dust as he summoned the artifact back into his grasp. "In my time, we called your people rattus. Scurrying little pieces of filth. The blood within your veins was the only thing you were ever good for, like living wineskins that we sliced open and drained at our leisure."

Her companions attacked, their attentions divided as the dragon bore down on them, magic and arrows falling uselessly against the barrier Corypheus surrounded himself with. Blackwall charged with a shout, his body batted away like a fly with little more than a gesture. "You are nothing," he continued, his hand shaking in his rage. "A race of sniveling cowards that shrank before Tevinter power. You will fall as a warning to those who oppose my divine will."

Isii could feel the pressure in her head building, her terror levelling into a strange sense of calm acceptance. This was the end. She could feel it as her throat gurgled under his grasp, her limbs growing heavy as darkness started to creep into the periphery of her vision. He would strangle her or break her neck - either outcome seemed inevitable. She tried to cast but her hands shook, little more than sparks at her fingertips that fell harmlessly against him.

Isii heard the howling snarl only seconds before her body jolted, suddenly released as a massive blur of white fur barrelled into the magister. She tried to suck in a breath before her body struck the ground, her lungs stunned by the impact as she rolled, careening further downward into the ravine below. The world spun, her body pummelled by the rocks and sharp roots as she scrambled to stop herself, grasping uselessly as she tumbled into the shallow stream at its base. The water burned against her abused body, cuts and scrapes painfully singing along her skin at the contact. She tried to rise, to move, but could do little more than roll herself over, keeping her face above the surface as she gasped for air.

She opened her eyes, trying to blink back the dizzying haze as she saw the giant wolf scaling down the side of the drop-off, six eyes fixed on her as it leapt from stone to stone.

*No, Fen'Harel. Gods, what have you done-*

"Isii! Isii, are you alright?" His panicked voice rumbled from unmoving lips, foreign and strange. She could hear his true voice beneath it, hidden behind a low growl, like a chorus of otherworldly whispers obscuring each syllable.

Another roaring scream caused his head to jerk upward, staring into the sky as the shadow of Corypheus's dragon fell over them. The beast rose into the air once more, the magister grasped in its claws.

"No!" she choked out, her voice hoarse as the rawness of her throat sent a throb of pain down her

neck. The wolf's gaze fell to her as his form changed, effortlessly shifting as the warmth of his fingers moved to her throat, healing some of the damage. "He has the orb."

"I know," Fen'Harel answered simply, the forced calm of his voice unable to mask the concern on his face as he wove his magic over her.

Isii stared up at him, her eyes widening. "You let them see you. Fen'Harel-"

"I had no other choice," he answered. "He was going to kill you."

"He was dead..." Her voice trailed away as her breaths shook.

Fen'Harel's hand went to her cheek, his fingertips entwining with the hair behind her ear as he leaned down, pressing his brow to her own, his eyes closing. "I thought I'd lost you."

The earnestness in his voice pained her, the crippling terror of the past few moments making her body tremble as she grasped his tunic, pulling herself against him, half-dragged into his lap as he wrapped his arms around her. She'd almost died. The helplessness she'd felt under Corypheus's grasp made her shake now, shivering as her heart continued to race, the raw intensity of her adrenaline making her bite her lip for fear of sobbing. She had killed him. She killed him and it didn't stop him from leaving her utterly powerless.

"Inquisitor!" Cassandra's voice sounded distant, a panicked shout echoing from the clearing above them as she ran toward the edge, looking down. "Maker, is she still alive?"

"She will be alright," Fen'Harel called up to her, turning his head back down toward Isii, angling his lips beside her ear. "It will be alright," he whispered to her, his arms tightening their hold. She took a few deep breaths, trying to steady herself. She needed to get up, to face her followers and bury her fear where they could not see it.

They may have won the battle, but the war was far from over.

## Chapter End Notes

I refuse to believe Celene would be wearing her ball gown from Halamshiral twice, let alone on a battlefield.... so I took inspiration from her ceremonial armor in Masked Empire.

# Chapter 18

## Chapter Notes

The latter half of this chapter is NSFW.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The aftermath of battle was met with a mixture of relief and apprehension. Corypheus's escape had robbed them of some of their jubilation, but the crushing defeat of his forces was an undeniable victory. Though few spoke to him directly, Fen'Harel could sense tension among those who had witnessed his transformation - and this same unsaid caution appeared to only spread as the Inquisition's forces regrouped and counted their losses. He moved among them as he normally would, choosing to ignore the suddenly hushed conversations and inquisitive stares rather than address the issue. There was more than enough work to occupy him. Many of their warriors had died and many more clung to life, writhing in their agony as their healers did what they could to ease the pain. He offered his services as he always did. Even in their reticence, no one would deny him that.

Before sundown, it was decided that the Inquisitor and a select number of her associates would begin their journey back to Skyhold ahead of their forces. Her advisors, along with the rest of her inner circle, would depart in the coming days once troop movements had been arranged. Fen'Harel was informed by messenger to prepare himself to leave as soon as possible.

Isii remained withdrawn as they began their trek, consumed with her own thoughts and seemingly disinterested in engaging with those around her. When they made camp for the night, she was the first to assemble her tent and retreat within it, refusing Dorian's coaxing when he tried to convince her to eat something before retiring for the evening. The Dread Wolf made no attempts to end her solitude. She was clearly troubled and wished to be alone.

Fen'Harel said little as he sat by the fire, his chin resting on his clasped hands as he considered the day's revelation. Corypheus had achieved immortality. It would explain how he survived the blast that created the Breach. It had never occurred to him to even consider this outcome possible, though now he felt some fault for not seeing it before. The magister was a blighted creature. He had used a Warden to act as his new vessel. That couldn't be a coincidence. Fen'Harel reasoned that the Grey Warden's connection to the taint, however obscured the nature of it was by the organization's secrecy, must be what allowed Corypheus such transference. Defeating him would certainly be complicated by this fact. The Dread Wolf had to consider his options carefully. He could not afford to put Isii into that same position again. Even beyond his emotional attachment to her, she was the key to retrieving his orb. More importantly, there was still a risk that the magister would use his stolen power to cause this world to collapse in on itself in his lust for godhood or in some foolish desire for revenge. Without the anchor, there was little he could do on his own to stop it. The next time they faced Corypheus, they had to be prepared with some plan to keep him from rising again.

Dorian approached the fire, rolling his shoulders with a yawn that appeared more performative than genuine. "I think I'm going to go for a walk," he said with a sigh. "I feel the need to stretch my legs a bit before settling in for the night. Care to join me, Solas?"

Fen'Harel lifted his gaze, peering at the man curiously. "Why?"

Dorian shrugged, the corner of his lips lifting. "Can't I simply enjoy the company of a friend for a little stroll?"

"A friend?" The Dread Wolf asked, his brow lifting. "I did not assume you saw me as such. Tell me, do you commonly hurl books at your friends as a form of entertainment?"

"Oh come now, I only managed to actually hit you once." Though the man laughed, he could sense there was an awkward tension in the look he gave him. The offer to accompany him was clearly an excuse to draw him away from camp. Whatever his reasons were, Fen'Harel nodded, solemnly rising to his feet.

Dorian fell into an uncomfortable silence as they walked, glancing over his shoulder periodically as the light from their camp's fire faded from view. Fen'Harel kept his eyes forward, his hands tucked comfortably behind his back.

"Solas," Dorian said haltingly, his lips pursed as he chose his next words carefully. "There's been some... *talk* about your recent performance in battle."

"I suspected as much," the Dread Wolf answered plainly.

"There have been some who have voiced..." He hesitated, clearly uncertain how to broach the topic that troubled him, "*concerns*, shall we say. Vivienne is convinced-" He stopped suddenly, turning his gaze toward him, an uncommon look of sincerity on his face. "I was being honest, Solas. I do consider you a friend. And as a friend, I felt it was only right to warn you, in case these accusations get out of hand."

Fen'Harel's brow furrowed. "Accusations?"

"If it was simply shapeshifting, that would be one thing," Dorian answered with a shrug. "Surprising, certainly. No one seemed to be aware it was an ability you possessed. But that in itself is not so uncommon among hedge mages, or so I've heard. But..." He paused, wetting his lips. "The glowing eyes... the amount of power you were using to maintain the barrier while simultaneously turning Corypheus into stone..."

Dorian halted, turning to face him with a sudden serious weight to his look. "I am not a fool, Solas," he said firmly. "I've seen the changes in you. Your magic has not been the same since... well, since whatever happened that caused you and Isii to have your falling out. She won't tell me what happened. Maker knows I've asked. But I've seen the reports. The two of you get pinned down by an encampment of Templars and it ends with everyone dead and you carrying her back to camp, the pair of you bloodied. I just..." He took a breath. "We all know you have had some *unconventional* relationships with spirits. If your back was truly against the wall, as it were, I could see the temptation in... seeking aid where you shouldn't have."

Fen'Harel paused, appraising him before his brows lifted. "Ah," he muttered softly. "I see. You believe I've become an abomination?"

"I'm not the one saying it," Dorian corrected quickly before his lips pursed. "Well, I suppose I am, but I'm not the only one."

"Do you truly think I would allow myself to become possessed?"

"Normally? No. But I wouldn't question for a moment that whatever danger the two of you faced in there, you would do whatever it took to keep her safe."

The weight of those words hung between them for a moment, Fen'Harel lowering his gaze. Dorian let out a slow breath, his arms crossing against his chest. "Look, I don't pretend to know what happened. And I am not accusing you of anything. But before we left, I heard plenty of people who seemed pretty well convinced that you are a liability, if not an outright danger to us. I thought the least I could do was to warn you. These are serious allegations, Solas. It doesn't take much for rumors like this to ruin a man."

"I appreciate your candor," the Dread Wolf answered calmly, meeting his eyes once more. "I assure you, I am not a danger to you."

Dorian stared at him for a moment, his brow tensing. "I want to believe that, Solas," he said quietly. "I truly do."

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Fen'Harel shifted on his bedroll, stealing a glance toward the entrance to his tent as he heard the quiet shuffling of footfalls nearby. A soft breath shuddered just beyond the canvas before he heard the hesitant whisper.

"Are you still awake?"

He rose, wordlessly pushing back the tent flap. Isii stood before him in the darkness, her eyes meeting his own for only a moment before they cast themselves downward, her bedding hugged in a tight bundle against her chest. She was nervous, anxiously worrying her lip with her teeth as her weight shifted uncomfortably. She took a breath to speak, perhaps to explain herself, to say what she wanted, but the request was clear enough. Fen'Harel stepped aside, holding the tent open for her as she silently slipped inside.

Neither of them spoke as she flattened her bedroll beside his own, her gaze cast aside as she straightened her blankets. He laid down once more, watching her, allowing her time to break her silence. It was not often that he would see her so quieted. Her behavior that afternoon and her swift retreat into seclusion made it clear enough that the day's events had left her troubled. The fact that she was here only added to that pile of evidence.

When she laid herself down she studied him for a moment, cautiously nudging his arm until he shifted, allowing her to bring her body closer as she rested her head against his chest. He could not help but smile at the contact, his fingers brushing gently through strands of her hair as she settled. Her silence remained, but it was a comfortable one now. Perhaps she merely wanted company or a soothing touch to calm her - both of which he was happy to give.

He listened to the slow pace of her breaths and wondered if she simply intended to fall asleep like this. It wouldn't be the first time. When they regularly shared a tent as lovers, she was fond of letting herself be lulled by his warmth and the rhythm of his heartbeat. Yet her fingers kept picking nervously at the front of his tunic, worrying the fabric with her thumb.

"Can you die?"

The abruptness of the question caught him off guard, the words barely breathed in a quiet whisper. His brow furrowed as she began again.

"I know you're immortal. Does that mean you'll live indefinitely until something kills you... or are you like Corypheus?"

He took a deep breath, cupping his palm to the back of her head gently. "I am not like Corypheus,"



he explained. "I am capable of dying. Just as you are."

He felt her shudder, her grip on his tunic tightening as she pressed her face into his chest. He could hear the tightness in her throat as her eyes began to water. "I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw him. Felt his hand around my throat. I kept thinking of what would have happened if you hadn't been there-

"Isii-

"I can't help but..." Her voice caught and she paused, trying to steady it as she whispered. "It makes me feel so foolish to be so afraid."

He ran his hand along her back, soothing her with slow strokes. "It's not foolish to fear death, Isii," he murmured back to her, lowering his lips to the top of her head. "You already know too well what my deepest fear is."

Her breaths shook as she curled her arm around his side, hugging him tightly. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do," she whimpered. "Everyone is counting on me to stop him. Everyone is expecting me to be able to... How do you stop someone that you can't kill?"

"Believe me," he said softly, "I've felt as you do now. And I cannot say the choices I made when faced with a similar obstacle were the right ones, but the task ahead of you is not a hopeless one. We will find a way through this. You've done the impossible before, Isii. I have no doubt that you will do so again."

As she drew herself closer, he could feel the press of something hard between her breasts, nestled beneath her tunic. He cautiously slid his fingertips below the back of her collar, curling curiously around the chain that encircled her throat. Isii lifted her head as he gently pulled, pushing herself up as he drew the object forward, cupping his palm around the amulet, *his* amulet, as it laid against her shirt.

His brow furrowed as he circled the stone with his thumb, the image of the wolf faintly visible in the low light of his tent. "You kept this?" he murmured, his eyes meeting her own. She looked back at him somewhat sheepishly, sitting back on her heels as she toyed with the gem between her fingers, her gaze falling.

"It was for the Dread Wolf's protection, wasn't it?" she asked quietly. "It seemed appropriate. You've always watched over me. Protected me. I wouldn't have made it this far if it wasn't for you." Even as he smiled her expression tensed, the corners of her lips drawing downward as her chin dropped, her eyes closing. "I am so sorry," she whispered, her throat tightening around the words.

He peered up at her, confused. "You have nothing to apologize for."

"No, I do." She took a breath, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. "You wanted to know why I kissed you?" He nodded. "It was because you said I hated you. And I don't," she whispered with a shake of her head. "I don't hate you. I can't. Gods, even when I wanted to..." She sniffled, her eyes cast aside as she wiped at them. "But I've done nothing to make you think otherwise." He touched her cheek and she warmed against the gesture, cupping his hand with her own even as she kept her gaze downcast. "I was so convinced that everything I knew about you was a lie. That you were only letting me see what I wanted to see. That all of this was just some ploy to get what you wanted from me. And even when I had proof, even when I knew that you loved me, that you truly care about me... I did nothing but hurt you with that."

“Isii,” he murmured softly, brushing his thumb along her cheek. “I wasn’t honest with you. About my identity or my reasons for being here. I don’t blame you for being wary of me. You had every reason not to trust me.”

*More reasons than you know.*

He pushed the thought aside, even as it made him wince. He could not tell her. Not now.

Her eyes met his own again, her lips turned downward, remorse weighing heavily on her features. “I’ve been so unfair to you, Fen’Harel. I’m... I’m ashamed of that.”

She stared at him, studying his features in the dim light before leaning down, hesitantly drawing closer as she pressed her lips to his own. The kiss was soft, chaste in its briefness until she kissed him again, cautiously exploring the limits of his affection as she eased herself over him. Her lips were so sweet, so supple as he coaxed them with his tongue and she answered with a sigh, opening to him, allowing him to take more. It was exquisite. *She* was exquisite. To be able to feel her again after all this time, to have the warmth and intimacy of her touch, far gentler than the heated groping that had overtaken them in the temple. Now, she was delicate, her hands sliding against his chest, fingers tracing the column of his throat as she breathed pleased murmurings against his lips. Isii shifted until she straddled him, his hands tracing the curve of her thighs as her weight settled over his lap. The rhythm of her sucking started to slide down her spine, her body following in time with the slow grind of her hips, her breasts brushing against his chest with each pass and he could not help but feel his heart begin to quicken, skin flushing with heat the longer she went. Rocking, swaying, caressing him with her body and it did not take long for his to respond. Each rutting thrust sent a throbbing ache through him, desire not slowly stirred but suddenly rushing through his veins, thrumming in his blood. He knew there was no hiding her effect on him. He knew she could feel the swell of his arousal, his cock hardening where it laid trapped beneath her. She lowered her weight even further, slow rolling drags full of intent as she ground herself against him, forcing him to muffle a groan against her waiting lips. He wanted her so desperately then, wanted to feel her skin against his, but his doubts lingered. She freed his mouth, her fingers curling around the hem of her tunic, slipping it over her head before leaning down once more.

“Isii, stop,” he breathed, panting as she stared down at him, her brow furrowing in concern. “You do not need to offer yourself to me as a form of apology.”

She studied him for a moment, shaking her head. “That’s not what this is,” she whispered. Isii leaned down, her fingers tracing the hollow of his cheek. “Please,” she sighed against his lips. “I just... I need this.”

He silenced his own objections as she slated her mouth over his own, his hands roaming the bared skin of her back, seeking the heat of her as she arched into his touch, cooing softly. This was what he wanted, wasn’t it? Having her, taking her - he had thought of it time and again, longed for it in his solitude, imagined it in all its possible incarnations. If this was the form of comfort she craved, he would supply it. If all she needed was to feel something, some distraction, some release from her tension, he could provide that. He wanted more from her than simple gratification, but he would not turn her away now.

He wrapped his arms around her, sitting upright, her legs cradled around his sides as she pressed into his lap, unable to get the same leverage as she squirmed. Instead her hands busied themselves with his tunic, tugging until she could pull it over his head. As soon as he was freed, he dove down for her throat, her head angling back as she sank against the press of his teeth.

“I missed this,” she whispered, a pained confession that made his grip on her tighten as he nipped at her skin. Her breaths shuddered as she wrapped her arms around him. “I missed you.” He pulled

the amulet away so he could suck along the line of her throat, relishing the small, hushed sounds she made as her back arched, magic trailing along his fingertips as he traced her sides. It pushed into her, filling her, teasing along her thighs as she trembled around him, energy sliding languidly down the length of her spine as he lit her senses. A brush of fire touched with ice, laced with the smallest hint of electricity, all curling and ebbing through her limbs, coiling in her core, producing the most beautiful whimper from her throat. There was so much he could offer her, ways of pleasuring her that were outside of her experience. He longed for the days when he could have given her ecstasy for weeks at a time, but would settle for this, for heated groping in the darkness, for muffled moans for fear of waking their companions. This could be enough.

He loosened her breastband, rolling her onto her back as he knelt over her, one knee anchored between her thighs as he bent down, learning the curved planes of her breasts with his lips, relishing the way Isii writhed beneath him, her nails raking gently against his scalp. Her leg hitched itself to his side, trying to draw his body closer as needy hips rocked against his thigh, but he would not rush this. He slowly dragged his tongue along her nipple, easing the hardened bud between the suckling roll of his lips and she keened, biting back moans as her eyes closed.

“Fen’Harel,” she whimpered and the sound nearly broke him, murmuring his title the way she had once said Solas. Not fearful or spiteful but softened with longing. Her hands gripped his shoulders, her fingertips digging into his back. Isii pulled, incessant, anxious to have his lips once more as he kissed her, her hand clutching the nape of his neck as her tongue pushed into his mouth. His fingers continued the work his lips had abandoned, stirring sensation as he cast into her skin, every moan she pressed into his mouth shivering down his spine. She pulled back with a gasp, nuzzling his cheek. “Ar lath ma,” she whispered, her lips drawn to his ear as she pulled him closer. “Ar lath ma, Fen’Harel. Solas, please.”

Her hips rose with her pleading and his eyes closed, his fingers loosening the laces on her breeches. “Say it again,” he murmured.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” she breathed, burying her face against his throat as his hand eased beneath cloth, seeking skin. “Ma sa’lath. Ma Fen. Ma - Ah!”

He shushed her as she cried out, his fingertips brushing against her clit, seeking the slick heat of her arousal as he parted her folds. She shoved her breeches down along her hips, eager to give his hand more freedom to move as he pressed against her entrance, watching her face as he slid a finger into her. Her lips parted, brows lifting, twisted with such exquisite torment as he touched her, her hips beginning to roll with each thrust.

“You’re so beautiful, Isii.” Her eyes opened as she gazed up at him, widening further as a second finger joined the first, the startled clenching of her walls easing as he stroked her. “You don’t know how long I’ve wanted to do this,” he whispered. “All those times I turned you away... I feared what you would think of me when you learned the truth.”

Her fingers traced the length of his ear, cupping the back of his head. “Kiss me.” He obeyed, savoring the tender press of her lips as his fingers curled, gently casting as he let the swell of his magic gradually build inside her. Heat lapped at her, intertwining with waves of frost, making her hips jerk, thrusting harder in their greed. He could sense her mana as it brushed against his own, stirred and straining until softened sparks lit along her skin, bright bursts cutting through the darkness as her back arched.

Isii’s breaths sped, stifling muffled sounds of pleasure and frustration; it was too much and not enough, never enough, her body wordlessly begging for more. Tension built, burning, searing, her thighs quaking, his thumb slowly circling her clit until she was gasping against his lips, pulling

away from his kiss as her breaths sharpened, holding him to her, his brow pressed to her own. He wanted to hear her, wanted to know how she would sound if those noises were for his ears alone, if their circumstances didn't demand restraint.

"Fen'Harel, I'm-" Her words were caught in a cry, barely silenced in her throat as she bit down on her lip. "I'm so... I'm going to... Solas, please. Please don't stop-"

"Rosas'da'din sul em, ma vhenan'ara," he breathed in her ear and she obeyed, unable to keep from moaning loudly as she came, her hand moving to cover her mouth as the rippling pleasure caused her body to shake. He did not slow his hand, her eyes widening further as his magic held her suspended at the peak of her pleasure, lingering at the height of climax. A pained whine pushed through her nose and he curled his head down to her cheek, kissing it gently.

"Ha'min, vhenan," he whispered. "One more."

Her hips bucked under his touch, jerking with each thrust of his fingers, clenching around him each time his thumb brushed her oversensitive clit, stroking the sparks her magic produced and redirecting them to his own purpose. Her muffled breaths couldn't drown out the wet sounds of each movement, so slick now that he could feel it dripping down his knuckles and he could not help but imagine how easily he could press himself into her, how warm and welcoming and perfect her body would feel. Instead, he focused on this, on the steady rhythm, on each whimpering gasp, on the way her muscles tightened and pulled and fought against sensation until finally finding relief. He swept her hand away and kissed her as she shattered beneath him, coming with a choked sob against his mouth. Isii grasped his wrist tightly, her hand trembling, nails digging crescents into his skin. He withdrew his fingers and soothed her, stroking her mound as her breaths shook, fingertips raking gently against her thighs as she slowly settled, the tightness of her hold weakening as her grip slackened.

When he pulled his lips from hers she was panting, worn and sated, her lids heavy as she looked up at him. Her hand eased itself against the front of his breeches, tracing his erection with her fingertips but he caught her wrist, shaking his head. "No. Not tonight."

Isii frowned, her head tilting curiously. "Allow me to make a selfish request," he began, kissing her forehead. "But when I make love to you, I want to take my time with it." He kissed her cheek, his lips lingering by her ear. "I want to savor you. To taste you." He could not help but grin as he felt her shudder at his words. "And I want to be able to hear you without fear of waking the others."

Isii studied his face as he pulled back, her brows lifting. "Are you certain?"

He smiled softly, lifting her hand to his lips. "I have waited for you this long, vhenan," he murmured. "I am more than capable of waiting until we reach Skyhold."

The corners of her lips lifted as she nodded. Isii shifted quietly in the darkness, her body weighed heavily by relief as she eased her breeches back into place. She abandoned the idea of retrieving her tunic, instead curling her body beside his, preferring the feeling of her bare skin against his own, his fingers trailing lazily between her shoulder blades as she relaxed into his embrace.

"I meant it," Isii whispered, her head angled down against his chest. "I love you. I'm sorry it took me so long to say it."

He kissed the top of her head, pausing to take in the scent of her hair. "Ar tas'lath ma, vhenan. I always have. And I always will."

Even as she slept, he could not help but stay awake, memorizing the rhythm of her breaths, the

weight and warmth of her against his chest, the sweet scent of her skin.

Solas could not remember a time where he felt a greater sense of contentment than this.

## Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Ar lath ma - I love you

Ma sa'lath - my only love

Ma Fen - My Wolf

Rosas'da'din sul em, ma vhenan'ara - Come for me, my heart's desire

Ha'min - Relax

Ar tas'lath ma - I love you too.

# Chapter 19

## Chapter Notes

The second part of this chapter is NSFW.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Cullen frowned, unease carved deep into the worn weariness of his features as he shook his head. "There has to be some other explanation."

"And what explanation do you expect to find?" Vivienne asked pointedly, her brow arched. The three of them spoke in hushed tones, the Seeker and Commander receiving her concerns with looks of wary doubt. It was important that they conversed with a level of discretion. Even with as confident as she was with her suspicions, they did not want to stir mistrust among the soldiers who still awaited their orders to return to Skyhold. The thought that an abomination had infiltrated the highest levels of the Inquisition would likely cause a panic if the issue was not handled delicately.

"He has a way with spirits that I've never seen," Cullen pressed, though his eyes betrayed the confidence of his tone. "A demon might kill him someday, but it will never possess him. He's too much like they are."

"You say that with such conviction, Commander," the Enchanter said, her chin lifting. "Yet I question what exactly you're basing that belief on. Solas's permissive attitudes towards demons, so far as to call them friends- are we to presume that he would see the danger for what it is? That he would not see bonding with one of them as an advantage, rather than a threat? He has no Circle training. Neither does Isii. Perhaps she would even approve of such a merger, in her ignorance."

"No," he said quickly, shaking his head again. "No, she knows the dangers. I am certain of that."

"Or perhaps you simply hope that is the case?" His gaze fell, doubts stirring as Vivienne continued. "The unfortunate reality, my dear Commander, is that our leader is and always will be a hedge mage. And she has repeatedly shown that her sympathies lie with her own kind. She bears no love for the Circle or its teachings. She sees the Templars and their precautions as little more than barbarism. We cannot assume anything about her beliefs on this subject - other than they may not align with our own." She pursed her lips, her brow creasing. "You of all people are intimately aware of the danger abominations present. If he is one of them - we cannot overlook that, no matter how benevolent he may pretend to be."

"There is...reason enough to be cautious." Cassandra murmured haltingly.

"Do you believe he has become possessed?" Cullen asked.

She hesitated, her thoughts clearly torn as she searched for a response. "Solas is a good man," she began. "I have a hard time believing that he would succumb to a demon. But I cannot explain what I saw. He wields magic unlike anything I have encountered before. That alone... troubles me."

"He has already exerted his influence over Isii," Vivienne said. "Even after the rather stormy dissolution of their relationship, she continues to hold his counsel above all others. Can we really afford to allow an abomination that amount of power within the Inquisition? There is no telling

what he may convince her to do.”

“Isii isn’t some naive fool,” Cullen countered. “She would not allow herself to be led blindly.”

“And yet a demon can easily twist the truth into whatever shape it desires. You know how well they can imitate their living hosts.” He cast his gaze aside as the Enchanter spoke. “She trusts him, Commander. His words carry weight. And that puts us all in a very dangerous predicament if a demon is truly speaking through him.”

“Maker help us if it’s true,” Cassandra muttered. “For now, this stays between us,” she added firmly, eyes fixed on the Enchanter. “If he is truly possessed, we do not want to raise his suspicion before we are prepared to act. And if not... he deserves to be given the opportunity to prove himself.”

“Of course, Seeker,” Vivienne said coolly. “I am not so heartless as to suggest we execute him without cause. But I know what I saw. It was not natural.”

“Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention, Enchanter,” Cullen said. “We will handle the issue from here.”

Vivienne smiled pleasantly, excusing herself with a nod. Cassandra studied the Commander’s face, her expression strained. “I do not want to believe it,” she said, her voice hushed to a whisper.

“Neither do I,” Cullen said, his hand shifting restlessly against the hilt of his sheathed sword. “But we have to be certain. If nothing else, Isii needs to be warned of the potential danger. If Solas has been compromised, it puts us all at risk.” He worried his other hand across the back of his neck, letting out a tense sigh. “He hasn’t shown any indication that he wishes to harm the Inquisitor. But I admit, I do not like the fact that she is all-but alone with him now. If he chose to act... Dorian and Varric are the only others in their party. They may not be enough to stop him if...” His words trailed away as he pinched at his brow. “Maker’s Breath...”

“We should leave for Skyhold at once,” Cassandra said. “If you and I proceed ahead of the troops, we might be able to catch up with them before they reach Skyhold. If nothing else, we could arrive shortly after.”

He nodded. “I will inform Josephine and Leliana. Let me know as soon as you’re prepared to depart.”

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Isii allowed her head to fall back against the edge of the tub as the water’s warmth eased the ache from her muscles. Her first act upon returning to Skyhold was ordering a bath to be drawn for her in her chambers. She needed to unwind - to wash away the strain of battle and the long trek back to their base of operations.

Even as she relaxed, a lingering tension remained, her body primed and anxious at the promise of what would come next.

She’d spent each night of their journey with Fen’Harel. And though he had ample opportunity, he never sought to take his pleasure in return for what he’d given her. There was an odd guilt in that. She felt selfish for taking without giving in kind. When she broached the subject, his stance remained the same. He wanted to wait until they returned to Skyhold. He wanted to take her in the privacy of her quarters, to permit himself the luxury of enjoying her body without concern of interruption or their companions overhearing them. He said that what he wanted would be neither

quiet nor brief - and the promise of that made her shudder now as her fingers dipped teasingly between her thighs. He'd said nothing upon their return. They parted as they normally would at the end of a mission with little more than a heated glance relaying his intentions before he retired to his room to stow his belongings.

Fingertips fluttered lightly over sensitive flesh, her eyes closing as she imagined what he might have in store for her, enticed by the thought that she would finally know how it would feel to have him inside her. Such things had fueled her fantasies when they were lovers, nights spent in solitary longing, his name whispered on her lips as she sought relief with her own touch. The months that had passed since then felt longer, as if it was some distant memory that had slowly rekindled, a desire stifled and marred by learning the truth about his identity.

That thought stilled her hand, a slight unease forming in her stomach as she withdrew.

He was the Dread Wolf.

And she wanted to take him to her bed.

Isii knew all too well now that the legends were ill-fitting upon the man. He wasn't a monster. He wasn't something to be feared. He loved her and he would not hurt her. And she cared for him. She trusted him. But what would that make her, in the eyes of her Keeper and her clan? A First who wanted the Dread Wolf to take her in the most literal perversion of their commonly hurled curse.

She let out a slow breath, rising from the tub. They wouldn't understand, but that would not stop her from pursuing him. They loved one another. And she had already let her fears and superstitions keep her from him for too long. The first night she joined him in his tent, she'd sought his comfort. She needed what Solas used to provide for her. Someone who could calm her. Someone who always seemed to know what to say to soothe her. She hadn't gone there looking for sex. That had been an unexpected development, but it was what she needed. She needed that release, something to break the tension, something to bring on the calm relief that followed in the wake of pleasure. She needed to feel him, to let herself give in and stop acting as though her feelings for him were something she needed to repress.

She was tired of fighting. Tired of holding him at arm's length. Perhaps it was foolish, but she wanted to embrace him as she had before. He was different now. There was no denying that. But he was still the man she fell in love with.

Isii dried herself off, letting her hair fall back against her shoulders once more as she reached for her robe. She was still securing the sash when she heard a soft knock on her door. She tried to swallow down the tight and coiled tension in her throat at the sound, standing by her desk as her hesitant voice bid entry. Her door opened with a low creak, closing again, the sound of the aged wood being the only indication of movement as he silently ascended the steps. Slow, steady advances. The last remnant of daylight struggled to hold back the shadows that crept through the corners of her quarters as Fen'Harel stood at the top of the stairwell, gazing at her. His posture was rigid and he studied her with a level of control that she'd grown familiar with. Reading signals and yet offering none in return.

His eyes flitted over to the tub before returning to her. "I hope I am not interrupting," he murmured, his voice softened as though the space between them were no more than a few inches.

Isii's hands nervously gripped the edge of the desk behind her, fingertips worrying the wood as she shook her head. "No," she answered. "I just finished."

"Good."



He advanced then. His steps were slow, though not hesitant. There seemed to be no caution, but a confidence that made the intensity of his gaze feel different somehow. Not fearsome, certainly. She was well past fearing him. But strangely intimidating, nonetheless.

The Dread Wolf's eyes drifted down to the sash of her robe before meeting hers once more. "May I?" he asked, his head tilting, the corner of his lips lifting. Isii swallowed, nodding her consent before his fingers went to the silken knot, worrying it loose. Her heart began to race, her chest strangely tight as he slowly slipped the fabric aside, exposing her as his eyes traced longingly down her form. Fen'Harel wet his lips, a warmer smile spreading across them.

"Ina'lan'ehn," he murmured, his fingers trailing gently along her jawline. "Having only seen your body in darkness, I can assure you - shadows do not do you justice, vhenan."

He drew closer, his hands skimming down her sides, her skin tingling in response to the lightness of his touch. Fingertips trailed lazily up her back, beneath her robe, his lips moving to her throat as her breaths shuddered. His kisses were soft, delicate, yet she could not keep herself from trembling as he touched her, stiff-backed and struggling to steady her breathing as she felt him pull at the garment, silk slipping lower on her shoulders as his mouth explored the newly revealed skin.

Fen'Harel paused, lips hovering close as one of his hands flattened against the small of her back. "You're shaking," he whispered, pulling his head back to peer into her face, concern twisting his brow. "Do you not want this?"

"No," she denied quickly, shaking her head. "No, I want this. It's just..." She took a breath, eyes shifting as she looked up at him. "Would you believe I'm a little nervous?" she asked, a small huff of laughter on her lips, her smile uncertain. "It's not every day one beds a god."

His expression shifted only slightly, a subtle sadness in his eyes as he tilted her chin, bringing his lips to her own. His touch demanded nothing, offering only an invitation as she relaxed against it, brushing her tongue along his lips when it became clear that he would allow her to set the pace of their kiss. His hand slid to the back of her neck, his body close, and though she was pressed to the edge of her desk he did not use the position to trap her. The singular kiss multiplied, coaxed with sighs as she reached out to touch him, hands skimming against the back of his tunic. When they pulled back for breath, he pressed his brow to her own, nuzzling gently.

"You don't know how long I have wanted this, Isii," he whispered. "Since that first kiss... before then, if I am being truly honest. Nights spent lying beside you. Aching to touch you." His hand slipped gently against her breast, his thumb caressing her nipple, making her breaths catch. "That night in Halamshiral, when you tried to take me to your bed - I wanted so desperately to give you anything you asked of me." He kissed her again, a light brush of his lips before they met her cheek, her jaw, easing down onto her neck. "I have dreamed of you. Of what this might be." His hands slid further down, squeezing gently at her hips as her heart quickened. "I want to give you pleasure, vhenan." The words themselves seemed to tremble down her spine as he shifted his weight, lowering himself to his knees, placing a soft kiss upon her belly. "I want to worship you in every way that you deserve."

He looked up at her then, the Dread Wolf, *a god*, kneeling before her. "All I ask is the privilege to do so," he whispered, leaning forward to kiss her hip. Her thigh. Her breaths sped, short and tight as his mouth teased closer, yet his eyes never left her own, seeking approval. Consent.

Isii nodded and he smiled warmly.

He took his time, his hands exploring the curve of her backside as his lips studied the soft skin of her thighs, slowly progressing until those kisses laid gently along her folds. Her breaths shook,

eyes closing as he traced them with his tongue, barely parting her slit. He guided her hips back against the edge of the desk, urging her to sit as he eased her legs over his shoulders, opening her body to his mouth's delicate search. He pressed a moaning sigh against her skin, as if relieved to finally taste her, his eyes closing as he began to lick in earnest. Her back arched, thighs tensing as she began to pant, her fingertips raking against his scalp. She was used to lovers who rushed in, quick tongues eager to finish her so they could seek their own pleasure in return. Fen'Harel was different. Slower. Softer. Savoring. Dragging his lips along her folds, unhurried, his tongue flattening against her in a leisurely rhythm.

"Fen'Harel-" He took the pleading whimper as a command for more, nuzzling her clit with his nose before wrapping his lips around it, teasing gentle pleasure as her senses heightened. Magic stirred where his hands settled along her thighs, skin tingling before the sensation poured into her, low, lapping waves of warm pleasure, like dipping into a slowly rising pool until she was enveloped, her head falling back as her chest rose and fell, lifted to a peak far faster than she expected. Orgasm came over her like a tender sigh but he did not stop- casting, licking, sucking until her body shook, forcing her to lean back against the desk. Something tumbled to the ground behind her but the sound was so distant, so outside of her focus that she could not bring herself to care. Her arms struggled to hold her as she braced against her elbows, a loud moan building into a desperate cry as another wave struck and broke, coming harder this time and then again. Again. Each stronger than the last, ebbing and flowing and uncontainable, so close in their timing that she could not tell one's end from another's beginning. Magic filled her and yet her body still felt so empty, muscles clenching to seek fullness as she shuddered.

"Solas! Please...I need... inside me..." Words didn't come easily and yet he answered without hesitation, his hand shifting from her leg before two of his fingers slipped past her entrance. His casting was so intense, magic unfiltered by flesh and sent directly to her core, pushing her into a scream as she bucked against it, her walls tightening around him, rocking against him, unable to stop herself. He pressed a lewd moan around her clit at the sound, the pulse of it rippling against her skin. She was more than simply wet, so slick that he moved easily inside her, fingers curled and curved until he found the tight bundle of nerves he sought. Her mind was in a haze, disconnected from everything but his touch, his magic leaving her feeling suspended, cradled, held in a constant state of bliss that she could not find words to describe. She'd used magic for her own pleasure before, but never like this. Never something this all-consuming. It was as if time itself was stretched, meaningless. There was nothing but him. His eyes looking up at her, tongue and fingers and teeth working in unison, leaving her incapable of anything but total surrender.

It was only when her breaths became so labored that she was gasping desperately for air that he slowed, his head lifting as his magic gradually lessened. Her body slackened as her senses slowly cleared, as if lowered gently back into her physical form. Isii's fingers curled at his collar, pulling weakly as she pushed herself upright and he was quick to assist, rising from his knees as his arm braced the small of her back, helping her sit up as her lips sought his own. She could taste herself on his tongue, his lips slick and reddened from their task, kissing her now with a desperate hunger he'd restrained before. Isii freed her arms from the slumping robe, loosening his belt, pulling at his tunic, shedding the barriers between them as she sought his skin. Her legs cradled his hips as he pulled her closer to the edge of the desk, allowing her hands to roam across smooth planes of lean muscle, tracing small scars that now seemed more significant than they ever had been before - the tapestry of a long and difficult life carved into his form.

Isii loosened his breeches, her brow pressed to his cheek as she carefully peeled back the rough cloth, freeing his cock from its confines. His head bowed, breathing a shuddering groan against her throat as her fingers curled around his shaft. It was long, thicker than she'd imagined, soft skin over hardened steel, a uniquely vulnerable gasp pushing past his lips as she slowly stroked him, the head of his cock brushing against her slit.

“Isii...”

“How long has it been?” she whispered.

She felt the press of his teeth as he muffled another moan, his hips rocking in time with her grip. “Centuries,” Fen’Harel murmured.

She nipped at his ear, her hand squeezing, eliciting a beautiful, needy sound as she teased him against her entrance. “Too long,” she said. “Far too long.”

He braced his hand against the desk, a shudder creeping down his spine. “The bed,” he choked out, his breaths hitched.

“The bed can wait.” She kissed him again, her legs tightening around him as she pressed him close, trapping his length between her folds. He moaned into her mouth as she ground herself against him, wetting him, ready to push him inside of her. Her body tensed as he gripped her hips, anticipating the pain and stretch of his entry, but instead he lifted her with a growl, forcing her to hold onto him as he pulled her from the desk. He turned, his movements quick as he carried her the short distance, sending her tumbling onto her back.

“Haman, vhenan,” he said with a smirk, his eyes darkened as she let out a breathy laugh. He stood before her for only a moment, freeing his legs from his breeches and wrappings before crawling up onto the mattress, parting her thighs with his knees. He kissed her. Again. And again. Mouths searing and hot, his tongue tracing and teasing her own as his hips shifted, his cock rubbing between their bodies, hard and eager, Isii trembling at the emptiness between her legs.

“If you don’t hurry up,” she breathed heavily against his lips, “I’m going to flip you over and take you myself.”

Solas smiled then, broadly, lovingly, brushing a strand of hair from her brow. “A tempting offer,” he whispered, his knees pushing closer to her hips, forcing her legs to lift higher along his sides as he reached down, angling his cock against her entrance. “One that will have to wait for another time.”

The first thrust sent her head back against the bedding, a shudder running through them both as the wet heat of her walls enveloped him. He groaned her name, easing back before pressing in again, deeper, slickened muscles fluttering as they stretched to accommodate, pleasure tinged with pain as he fully seated himself inside her. “Vhenan...” Another thrust. Another gasp. “You feel so... so much better than...” Whatever words he sought melted away into a moan, lost in the steady pace as buried his face in the fall of her hair, his lips pressed to her throat. There was nothing rough in this. He began gently, rocking in and out in time with their breaths, his magic caressing her like silken fingers slipping over her skin, even as his own hands braced themselves against the bed, tightened into fists. His body was coiled with tension, taut restraint, sharp exhales pushed past clenched teeth. He was holding back. She could feel it in the way he moved, hear it in the ragged sounds that caught thick in his throat.

She wrapped her arms around him, pulling his chest to her own, nails raking his shoulders. “You aren’t going to break me, Dread Wolf,” she murmured, nipping his ear, moaning as he slid into her again. “Bre’pala em. Elvarel.”

He groaned, answering with a sharp snap of his hips, pausing only to test the yield of her body, to confirm her pleasure through her gasping moan before repeating, harder, one hand bracing her hip as he drove himself into her. Heat coiled in her belly, nerves singing in the wake of each collision as she rocked back against his quickening pace. She cursed, breathless as she pleaded for more and

he answered, he gave, drinking in the sight of her as she writhed beneath him, as she sobbed his names, both of them, for the man he was and the god he became. He buried himself, so deep and so full and she needed this, she needed him, she needed to come and to scream and to feel him release inside her. The thought of it sent her over the edge, eyes squeezing shut as she felt the tension finally break, shattering, shuddering around him as he let out a harsh moan. He whispered low in her ear, ancient words making poetry of filth, praising her for how good it felt when she came, how her cunt clenched around him, how he didn't want her to stop. She felt his magic surge inside her, holding her, taut and steady and suspended in ecstasy, her body trembling and she could do little more than ride each wave of pleasure. Every sound he made seemed to claw at her skin, shivering and sharp as he voiced his pleasure, his relief and desire laid bare.

"Please," she gasped, holding onto him, hands shaking as she gripped him. "Please, Fen'Harel. Solas. Come for me. Banalas in'em. *Please*." Her pleading drew a growl from him, teeth tightening against her shoulder as he muffled a sharp curse, buried deep as she felt the throbbing pulse of his release. His body shuddered, groaning as his muscles slackened, his magic finally subsiding as she gasped for breath, the weight of his body pressing down against her.

They stilled then, Isii nuzzling his neck as Solas panted, her hands smoothing over the sweat-slicked skin of his back. He pulled up only far enough to rest his brow against her own, pressing a slow and hazy kiss to her lips. "Ar lath ma..."

"I know," she whispered back to him, her hand cupping his cheek, soft breaths on his lips as she held him.

They stayed like that for a time before Fen'Harel slowly pushed himself up, his cock slipping from her met with shaking breaths as they both shuddered. He lowered himself to the bed and she curled herself along his side, not caring about the sticky warmth that now spread between her thighs. She wanted to feel him, to lay beside him, resting her head against his chest as she listened to his heartbeat gradually settle into a slower pace. She felt warm and relaxed, her limbs heavy with contentment despite their subtle ache. Her eyes closed, consciousness lazily drifting in the afterglow, tempted to simply fall asleep just as they were - naked and lying above her blankets, her pillows still well out of reach.

When he broke the silence, his voice was low, murmuring, his fingers slowly working through strands of her hair. "I suppose this is the point where I am supposed to say something about elven glory."

Isii laughed, hard, trying to resist the urge to snort as she pushed herself up against his chest, looking down at him. "Fenedhis, she told you about that?"

Fen'Harel chuckled, his brows lifting. "Is there any aspect of Sera that makes you think she wouldn't?" She couldn't suppress her giggling, burying her face against his chest as her body shook, his laughter warm beneath her. When she lifted her head again he was smiling, brushing hair back from her cheek. "It is good to hear your laughter, vhenan," he said softly. "I had grown to miss it."

She pressed into his hand as his palm cupped her cheek. "Ir abelas, Solas."

"Don't be," he murmured, shaking his head. "I have you again. That's all that matters to me."

She smiled sweetly before her eyes fell to his chest, her fingers tracing absentmindedly across his skin. "I never asked you which name you prefer. If you wanted me to call you Solas or Fen'Harel."

"Both names are a part of my identity. I am no less one than the other," he said, placing his hand

over her own, the corner of his lips lifting. “But it is good to hear you ask.”

“Then I suppose I’ll have to use both,” she said teasingly, pressing a soft kiss to his cheek. “Ar lath ma, Fen’Harel,” she whispered softly before kissing his other cheek. “Ar lath ma, Solas.”

She hovered over his lips then, fingertips tracing his chin. “Ar lath ma, vhenan,” she murmured before drawing him into a slow and tender kiss.

## Chapter End Notes

*Gotta earn that Explicit rating somehow, right?*

**You can now see part of Fen'Harel's POV from this chapter over in my [Bonus Materials fic](#).**

Cullen’s comment about Solas being “too much like [demons] are” is from World of Thedas vol 2.

Translations:

Ina’lan’ehn - beautiful

Haman - bed

Bre’pala em. Elvarel. - Fuck me deep. Harder.

Banalas in’em - Empty yourself inside me.

Fenedhis - a common elvhen curse

Ir abelas - I’m sorry.

## Chapter 20

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Isii woke slowly, consciousness drifting lazily out of the Fade as she gradually became aware of her physical form. It felt as though she still lingered in a dream; her body warm, blankets tucked softly over her bare skin, the steady rise and fall of Solas's chest against her back. But the weight of him was real, his scent mingled with her own on her skin. She shifted only slightly, not wanting to wake him as she yawned, trying to stretch. Her body felt stiff, though it did not ache as she'd imagined it would. The Dread Wolf had taken care to heal her as needed when they resumed their lovemaking. And though she usually hated the word, finding it far too euphemistic for the act of sex, it seemed the only fitting one. He'd made love to her. Every touch held silent praises, tracing devotion into her skin, reverent and thankful for each caress. Whispering *ar lath ma* as if he felt compelled to remind her, refusing to allow the words to be left unsaid. It felt far more intimate than she had anticipated. He did not treat her as a conquest or a convenient source of pleasure. Her body was a gift that he treasured.

She was smiling at the thought when she felt him stir, his arm tightening around her as his lips grazed the back of her neck. "Good morning," she murmured, her voice husky from sleep.

"Good afternoon."

She blinked, peering at the light streaming in through her windows. "Is it really that late?" He hummed a low affirmation as his kisses trailed onto her ear. Isii took a deep breath, stretching now in earnest as she tried to stifle another yawn. "I don't remember the last time I slept this long."

"It is good that you did," he said. "You needed your rest. Time to recover."

"You did wear me out last night," she purred.

"I meant from the rigors of battle," he said, chuckling as his lips stilled against her skin. "But yes, I suppose. That too."

She giggled, grinning as she turned in his arms, shifting until her lips found his own. The kiss was soft and slow, unhurried as she settled with a sigh. When she pulled back he gazed at her, so warm and so loving that she couldn't help but smile shyly, her fingers playing over his chest.

"Can we start every morning like this?" she asked, nuzzling the tip of her nose against his own. "I mean, I fully expect you to keep your own quarters. But... I would like it if you slept here from now on."

He smiled, his brow pressed to hers as his eyes closed. "I would like that too."

Their blissful silence was soon halted by a knock on her door. Isii groaned, burying her face against him. "I don't want to get up," she whined, her voice muffled. He laughed quietly, running a soothing hand along her back. "It's probably just one of the servants looking to retrieve the bathing tub."

"Then you should not keep them waiting," he murmured, his voice rumbling low in his chest. "Do you want me to leave?"

"No," she said, placing another soft kiss upon his skin before shuffling toward the edge of the bed.

“You stay right there. I’ll tell them they can get the damn thing later.”

The sudden rush of cold air nearly undid her resolve but she fought the urge to crawl back into his inviting warmth as she retrieved her robe. She tied it loosely, quickly descending the steps as a second knock sounded, louder this time.

She opened the door and paused, surprised.

“Cullen?” The Commander stared back at her, his features strained as she tightened her robe, running a self-conscious hand over her mussed hair. “I didn’t realize you had returned.”

“Cassandra and I just arrived,” he said. Something was off in his voice. Isii could hear it, though she couldn’t place the source. He sounded worried.

“Is something wrong?”

He cleared his throat, his stance displaying his discomfort as his gaze shifted. “We need to speak with you. There is... a matter we must discuss at once.”

“I understand,” Isii said, her demeanor slipping back into her role as Inquisitor. “I’ll meet you in the War Room as soon as I am dressed.”

He nodded, taking the dismissal with a quick stride as she closed the door. She slumped against it for a moment, sighing.

She shouldn’t have expected to have a day’s respite.

There was always some new problem that needed her attention.

She made her way back up the stairs, finding Solas retrieving his clothes. “I take it you heard?”

He offered her a reassuring smile. “I am under no impression that I can make demands of your time, Inquisitor,” he said. He slipped his breeches on, lacing them before he sat on the edge of the bed, his hands working over his leg wrappings. “Besides, I can always rejoin you this evening.”

She walked over to him, leaning down to place a kiss against his scalp, her fingers stroking his cheek. “I’ll find you after the meeting,” she whispered. “I promise.”

He grinned, angling his chin up to meet her lips. “I look forward to it.”

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“You can’t be serious,” Isii balked, searching their faces.

From their grim expressions, she could tell that they were.

Completely serious.

“We know this is difficult to accept-”

“No,” Isii said firmly, cutting Cassandra off. “He’s not an abomination.”

“Can you be sure of that?” Cullen pressed.

“I am,” she said.

“How?”

Isii’s mind raced. How could she dispel their assumptions without revealing Fen’Harel’s secret? Would they even believe her if she did? He was a god, not a demon - but there was no reason why they would ever come to the truth on their own. The conclusion was too far-fetched. Too impossible for a set of Andrastians to believe. She felt as though she should have seen this coming. Of course they would explain the change in him as being a sign of possession. That’s how humans seemed to normally view whatever they could not understand.

“I just do,” Isii said, shaking her head. “There is no way he would ever be overcome by a demon.” She looked to the Seeker, her brows lifting. “Cass, Solas is your friend. You know him. You know he’d never make that kind of bargain.”

Cassandra lowered her gaze, her brow furrowed. “I want to believe that. But I cannot ignore the evidence, no matter what my personal feelings may be. There is no other viable explanation.”

“You once thought I’d killed everyone at the Conclave because you lacked another viable explanation,” Isii hissed. “And you still trusted me to help you.”

“Only when I had proof,” she countered. “The voices at the temple were enough to make me believe your innocence.”

“Isii,” Cullen began, his voice softened. “We don’t take this issue lightly. We wouldn’t accuse him of anything if we didn’t think there was just cause for our concern.”

“You don’t have just cause,” Isii said quickly. “All you have is evidence that he’s used magic that is unfamiliar to you. His studies in the Fade have led him to all sorts of information that he could not come to in any other fashion. Why would this be any different?”

“That is the explanation he offers, yes,” Cassandra said, “and yet that is based on nothing but his word alone. And it does not explain the amount of power he clearly possesses. He is a Dreamer, Inquisitor. That gift makes him more susceptible to possession than any other mage.”

“He’s not possessed!” Isii said, her voice lifting.

“We have to be sure of it,” Cullen said.

“Then how?” Isii asked sharply. “What exactly will satisfy you that I’m telling the truth?”

His expression tensed, wincing as a grim weight settled over it. “The Templars have ways of determining whether or not someone is possessed,” he explained, his gaze lowered to the table as he chose his words carefully. “Methods of testing the subject. Neutralizing their magic and then forcing the demon to defend itself, if present.”

“You mean to torture him,” Isii said icily. When Cullen’s eyes met her own, he looked apologetic - but he made no denials. “No,” she said angrily, shaking her head. “No, I absolutely forbid it.”

“Inquisitor, try to understand us,” Cassandra said. “Neither one of us want to see Solas come to harm. But we have no other choice. If he is truly an abomination, he puts all of us at risk. You have to put your personal feelings aside-”

“No, I don’t,” Isii snapped. “This has *nothing* to do with my feelings for him. I wouldn’t let *anyone* who seeks to aid the Inquisition be tortured for the sake of satisfying an unsubstantiated rumor.” She tightened her hands into fists at her sides, trying to stop them from trembling. “And that’s all this is. A rumor. Nothing more.”



“Inquisitor-”

“End of discussion,” she commanded sharply. “I won’t hear any more of this unless you actually have proof. Do I make myself clear?”

The two of them remained silent for a moment, staring back at her before Cullen nodded. “As you wish, Inquisitor.”

Isii turned on her heel, not waiting to see if they had anything further to say, her stomach churning.

She had to find Solas and warn him.

There was no hesitation in her steps as she walked briskly into the rotunda, her lover’s smile faltering as he saw her anxious expression. He took a breath to speak but she cut off his words, lifting her hand. “We need to talk,” she said quickly. “Alone. Meet me in the archives as soon as you can.”

The tenderness seemed to leave his face, falling into his normal reserve as he nodded. “Ma nuvenin.”

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His expression changed little as she recounted what the Seeker and Commander had told her. How Vivienne was all-but convinced of his guilt. How Cullen and Cassandra thought her suspicions were worthy of testing his innocence. How Isii had stubbornly refused. All the while her anxiety bubbled tightly in her throat. This was serious. He could be in danger if they were not careful.

Isii chewed on her lip, studying his face as his gaze lowered. “You don’t seem surprised,” She whispered.

“Dorian warned me of the rumor,” Fen’Harel explained calmly. “Madame de Fer is not a fool. It only makes sense that she would bring her concerns to the two members of our organization who have the most experience with handling abominations. If nothing else, their shared experiences dealing with dangerous mages would make them likely allies in her eyes.”

Isii wrung her hands. “Do you think I should tell them the truth?”

“Do you believe that would solve anything?” he asked, his eyes meeting her own. “There is a fair chance they would not believe you. Do you suppose you would be willing to accept that someone you have worked alongside for months was Andraste or the Maker? I am no more real to them than their god is to you.”

Isii frowned, wanting to object, but the words could not make their way to her lips. It was true. She had no faith in their religion, nor they for hers.

“Let us suppose for a moment that they believed you,” he continued. “If they rejected the notion that my claim to be the Dread Wolf was another lie to mask the truth - would it not merely strengthen their cause to fear me? What little they may know of me is from the legends your people have preserved. They already fear a man who is on a path to claim godhood. Knowing that such a figure is among them, having already deceived them...” He paused then, letting out a slow breath as he shook his head. “I would not worry yourself on my account.”

“How can I not?” she asked, frowning. “Solas, they execute people on the mere suspicion that they’ve been possessed.”

“I don’t see that happening,” he said. “Not without your approval.” Isii sighed as he approached her, his hands smoothing over her arms. “I will do my best to avoid drawing any further attention to myself. There is a fair chance these rumors will simply dissipate if there is nothing further to raise their suspicion. It is not as though I am the first mage to be falsely accused.”

“I suppose,” she murmured halfheartedly. It felt as though they had little choice, otherwise.

He paused, his fingers stalling against her as his words hesitated on his tongue. “It might be best that we are not open about the recent developments between us.”

Isii frowned, shaking her head. “Solas-”

“We must consider how you will be perceived,” he explained softly. “I would not want anyone to be able to claim your judgement is biased concerning me. If they know of our intimacy, they may lose faith in you.” His fingers went to her chin, his thumb stroking it gently. “I would not want them to assume I am manipulating you. Especially given their doubts over my nature.”

Her fingers curled around his wrist as she looked into his eyes. “I don’t want to lose you because of this,” she said, her voice hushed.

He smiled. “You will not lose me, vhenan.” He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, cupping it gently. “And I am not eager to sacrifice the time I could share with you. I am merely suggesting we act with discretion.” He kissed her forehead. “I have means of moving around unnoticed, if I so choose. I can come to your quarters after nightfall and leave by sunrise. That way, there would only be a few guards patrolling my path. It would be easy enough for me to avoid detection. If we remain diligent, then by all appearances our relationship would be no different than it has been in recent months.”

Isii considered this for a moment, worrying her lip with her teeth. “And you’d be happy with this arrangement? Creeping around as if I should be ashamed of you?”

His expression softened as he stroked her cheek. “It will only be temporary, vhenan,” he murmured. “This is as much a measure to protect myself as well as your reputation. You cannot defend me if they believe you are blind to my faults.” The corner of his lips lifted slightly, his brows raising. “Of which you know far more than most.”

She smiled then, a small relief to her worried features as she leaned up onto her toes, pressing a kiss to his lips. His arms slipped around her as it deepened, holding her close.

She was tired of secrets, but this was for the better. It was not so different from when their romance began, when they chose to keep their affections to themselves for the sake of their own privacy.

She could maintain the facade that nothing had changed.

She was certain of it.

## Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Ma nuvenin - as you wish



# Chapter 21

## Chapter Notes

The first part of this chapter is NSFW.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The following week passed slowly, seeing the return of the Inquisition's inner circle and a small number of their troops. Despite the palpable tension that hung unspoken in the air, no one confronted Solas directly with their suspicions. Though Isii caught some hushed tones and strained glances being directed toward him, on the surface everything appeared to return to some sense of normalcy as they settled once more into the rhythm of life at Skyhold. She remained determined to stay close enough to keep a watchful eye on Fen'Harel just in case, trying her best to appear as unmoved by his presence as before. Isii would find excuses to linger in the rotunda - browsing the library above, sharing idle conversation while her eyes would drift downward. She could not fully let go of her fear that the worst was yet to come - but each day that passed without incident soothed her nerves somewhat.

For the most part, they both played their roles well. Solas would slip quietly out of her bed each morning and they would meet again as if their last moments hadn't been spent tangled beneath her sheets, stealing kisses in the brief time they had before he had to leave. Today was no different. They exchanged little more than a cordial nod as she settled onto the couch in his study, lounging against the arm as she flipped through the book she was carrying. Her eyes would lift occasionally to find him staring, his gaze quickly darting back to the tome that lay open on his desk as she resisted the urge to smile. This game they were playing made their anticipation palpable, both relishing the newfound carnality of their relationship while straining against the restrictions they had placed on themselves. They could do little to find satisfaction during the day, confined to the occasional brush of a hand or looks that communicated unspoken desires. There was almost a perverse thrill in it, if she was being truly honest. The promise of pleasure became so much more enthralling when their circumstances forced them to wait.

Today, Fen'Harel was not interested in waiting.

Isii felt the tingling brush of magic against her lips, curling along her jaw, caressing her throat as she shot a quick glance across the room. Solas's eyes were fixed on her, his posture eerily still where he stood beside his desk, his weight braced on his hands. From above, she was certain it would still look as though he was studying the writing in front of him, but there was no doubting that his focus was entirely on her. His brow lifted - a subtle gesture. A question. Awaiting invitation. Her eyes darted up to the people above them, settled into their daily routine, any one of whom could look down and see them. But when her eyes met his again he simply smiled, a certain daring look behind his calm facade. She wet her lips and nodded, fixing her gaze on the book in her lap as his magic slipped lower, wisps of energy kissing along her collarbone, teasing over her breasts as her eyes fluttered closed. A sudden chill prickled under her skin, frost soon met with fire as it slid languidly over her belly and she did her best to control her breathing, her back arching against the arm of the couch, thighs pressed tightly together as he stroked them from afar. The sensation was not quite like touch - it lacked the weight of a physical connection, like some faint afterimage of fingers slowly creeping closer to the quickening heat that was building between her legs. She stared at her book and yet the words before her had lost all meaning, her hands grasping

tight around its binding as she took a sharp breath, feeling the press of him easing inside her. There was a wicked thrill in this, knowing she could be seen, her toes curling in her boots, heels digging into the cushion below as she looked back to Solas once more. The utter calmness of his demeanor was maddening and yet she could see the dark focus in his gaze, the way his fists tightened against the desk. He wanted her as desperately as she wanted him.

“It seems I require a book from the basement archives,” he said, his voice low and full of promise as she felt a sudden pressure swelling in her core. The shock of it forced a whimper from her, a sharp sound that pinched in her throat, quickly covered by a cough. His smile widened. “Would you mind assisting me, Inquisitor?”

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They barely closed the door behind them before he was on her, lips crashing as they staggered, his body pushing her further into the room as her arms wrapped around him, crushing him against her chest. Her back hit a bookcase, startled laughter on her lips as he hungrily nipped at her neck, his hands roaming over her clothing.

“Forgive my impatience, vhenan,” he breathed in her ear, his fingers eagerly loosening the fastenings on her jacket, tugging her tunic down so his lips could trail over the swells of her breasts. “But I’ve been able to think of little else all day.”

Isii giggled breathlessly as she rocked her hips forward, brushing against the rigid length of his arousal, forcing a low groan to rumble in his throat. “Couldn’t wait until tonight?”

“I could not wait a moment longer.”

“Then don’t,” she murmured, slating her mouth over his as she tugged on his belt, his hands quickly pulling on her breeches’s lacings. He knew they shouldn’t be doing this. He knew he should have more self control, that it was selfish of him to demand more after telling her they should act only with discretion, but he could not help himself. This past week had only reawakened his desires - and it had been so very long since he’d indulged in physical pleasure.

Her laughter was intoxicating, rippling and happy and freeing as he turned her roughly by the hips, her hands catching the edge of a shelf as he shoved her breeches lower, taking her smalls with them. “You don’t know what you do to me, Isii,” he whispered, his nails raking over the bare skin of her hips. “Ma uthlath. Ma asha’venuralas.” She shuddered at the words as he kissed her throat, licking and sucking on the blade of her ear, drinking in the sounds of her anticipation as she let out a small whine. Her hips arched back, his fingers smoothing over soft, curved skin. This would have to be quick. He could not afford to take his time with her as he wanted to. He vowed to make up for that later. He pushed his tunic aside, tearing at the laces that kept him from entering her, her hand running over his own where he braced himself, her fingers lacing with his.

It was then that he heard the determined footsteps echoing down the stairwell.

Fen’Harel let out a frustrated snarl, cursing. “Someone’s coming,” he warned and Isii was quick to act, the pair of them struggling to right their clothing as the steps drew nearer. This had been foolish. A risk he should not have taken. He fetched his fallen belt, having only just secured it as the door began to open. Isii had managed to tug her breeches into place, untied laces covered by her half-opened jacket, her tunic still partially exposed. She turned her back to the door, snatching a random book off the shelf, acting as if she was studying it intently while muttering under her breath, her fingers fumbling with the last of her fastenings.

“Inquisitor,” the messenger said breathlessly. “Pardon the interruption, but Leliana needs to see you

at once.”

“Can it wait?” Isii snapped, the words half-bitten in a growl.

“She said Lady Morrigan is gone.”

Isii turned, frowning. “What? Gone where?”

“She went through something called an eluvian?” The word sounded unfamiliar on the woman’s tongue. “Leliana is waiting for you by the gardens, in the room next to the-”

“Yes, I know the place,” Isii said, cutting her off. “Thank you. You’re dismissed.”

The woman seemed uncertain for a moment but then nodded, quickly leaving the room. Isii let out a tense breath, slipping the book back onto the shelf.

“I am sorry,” Solas began. “I shouldn’t have-”

“Hush,” she said, grabbing his tunic and tugging him down into a quick kiss before she tightened the laces on her breeches.. “Just hold that thought, ok?”

He smiled, relief and amusement outweighing his remorse as he nodded. “Ma nuvenin.”

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“Inquisitor! Thank the Maker you’re here.” Leliana’s voice was pinched with panic as she stood beside the open mirror, its bright glow flooding the small room. “Morrigan just chased after her son into the eluvian.”

Isii frowned. “She was chasing Kieran?”

“She said he activated it somehow and then she ran into it.” The woman frowned, wringing her hands. “I’ve never seen Morrigan like that. She seemed absolutely terrified and that woman does not scare easily. I fear the worst - she shouldn’t be in there alone. You must go after her.”

Isii nodded, eyeing the glass. The prospect of entering into the Crossroads alone left her with a sharp sense of unease, but she couldn’t imagine leaving Kieran to his own devices. A child could get easily lost among the endless sea of rubble and she remembered how disorienting those twisted pathways could be. She took a breath to steel herself, wordlessly passing through the portal.

She froze the instant the blinding light faded from her eyes, her vision shifting to take in her new surroundings.

This wasn’t the Crossroads.

This was the Fade.

Her stomach sank as she took in the familiar sight, as dark and dreary and full of dread as it had been when she saw it at Adamant. Crumbling remnants of structures, haphazard statues - small reflections of the world beyond torn into fragments that spanned time and space. This place felt just as eerie and unnatural as it had before, an ominous and yet not entirely audible thrumming filling the air, humming so low that it was as if she could sense it more clearly than she could actually hear it.

Isii took a deep, determined breath. Kieran was in here, as was Morrigan. She’d already had to leave one person behind in the Fade - she was not about to add two more to her conscience.

She strode ahead quickly, taking care to memorize the shape of her path for fear of losing her way back to the eluvian. She could hear Morrigan's voice echoing in the distance, calling out for her son and Isii followed the sound, quickly jogging closer as she spotted the witch.

"Morrigan!"

Her advisor glanced back and Isii could see the despair on her face before she immediately turned, continuing down the path she'd been taking. "Why would Kieran do this?" she asked, her voice strained as Isii closed the distance between them, matching her pace. "*How* could he do this? We stand in the Fade. To direct and eluvian here would require *immense* power." Her breaths were ragged, trembling as her eyes scanned the empty distance ahead. "If he is lost to me now, after all I've sacrificed..."

"We'll find him, Morrigan," Isii said firmly. "He can't have gone far."

"The Fade is infinite!" she snapped, unable to hide her panic. "He could *literally* be anywhere." Morrigan took an unsteady breath, shaking her head. "Whatever happens to him now is my doing. I set him on this path. Please, Inquisitor. Help me look for him."

"Just don't wander too far from me," Isii said. "I don't want to lose you both in here."

They said little as they picked through the darkness, the sickly hue of the sky bathing everything in a bizarre green shade as their boots struck the dirt. The ground was uneven, peppered with strange fossilized impressions that Isii couldn't identify, as if they strode across the naked bed of an ancient sea. Jagged rock formations hung in mid-air, stark and black and blocking out the mimicry of sunlight above. Statues marked the path - the horned dragons of Tevinter, the carved heads of the Alamarri, the pointing figure of Falon'Din guiding them into death. The stone itself seemed to take on the shape of malformed faces, twisted in horror, groaning silently in their endless torment. Hunched figures emerged from the rock, bearing hollowed faces that their hands tore at in grief, torches of veilfire embedded in their chests. Spirits drifted by aimlessly, red skeletal forms hovering, their postures slumped under some unseen weight. Isii tried fruitlessly to reach out to them as she would in dreaming, to touch them with her mind as Fen'Harel had taught her to do, yet they remained unresponsive. She supposed the Fade worked differently when it took physical shape. Any hope she had of gaining their assistance fled quickly.

Morrigan rounded a bend, her breaths sharpening with a gasp as her steps sped. "There he is!" she shouted in relief as Isii struggled to keep up with her. She could see a clearing ahead - the tall structure of a cloaked figure looming high above, bracing himself on his fists, his back pierced with a sword that jutted harshly into the sky. Blood poured from his chest and his unseen face, perpetually falling in pillars of crimson, splattering the rubble beneath. The ground was littered with bones, piles of skeletal remains all coated by the macabre fountain. Standing before this grotesque display was Kieran, his hand glowing, calmly outstretched to the figure who knelt before him - clothed in swaths of deep burgundy, their silhouette sharpened by the jagged edges of their spiked armor.

"Who's that with him?" Isii asked.

"That's... No," Morrigan said, her voice filling with dread. "It can't be."

The figure lifted its head as Kieran's magic dissipated, long white hair falling from beneath the stark lines of the crown she bore, metal curling along the slope of her wrinkled cheeks. The rest of her hair was bound, twisting and arching behind her head, sculpted in a fashion to resemble horns. The old woman turned to face them, a slow smile pulling at the sagging corners of her mouth, yet there appeared to be no warmth in the expression. Kieran's face brightened as he shouted.

“Mother!”

Morrigan’s relief had quickly fled, her shock hardening into a glare, her eyes fixed on the woman beside her son. “*Mother*,” she said icily.

The woman pushed herself from her knees, her smile broadening. “Now, isn’t this a surprise?”

“This is your mother?” Isii said, uncertain. The woman before her was an imposing figure, standing tall, her posture eerily straight. Her clothing was bizarre - darkly reddened leathers bearing tightly to her frame, large black feathers emerging from the base of her high collar, her arms and legs clad in steel plate. Her eyes were blackened with kohl, thickly lined around a pair of golden irises that certainly bore a strong resemblance to her advisor. Isii glanced between the two women, her brow furrowing as she saw the tension on Morrigan’s face. “A pleasure to meet you, I suppose,” she murmured, though there was little conviction behind the greeting.

The old woman smirked, chuckling to herself. “You see, girl?” she said, gesturing to Isii with a wave of her hand. “Those are manners, as you require a demonstration.”

“I require nothing from you but your death,” Morrigan hissed, her fists clenching at her sides.

Her mother seemed unimpressed, her brows lifting in feigned interest. “You tried that once already, and see how far it got you?”

“So what is this?” Isii asked, frowning. “Some kind of family reunion?”

The woman laughed again. It was an unsettling sound, full of mirth and menace. “Mother, daughter, grandson. It rather warms the heart, does it not?” she added with a tilt of her head.

“Kieran is *not* your grandson!”

The boy stared at Morrigan, his face pulled with shy remorse. “I’m sorry, Mother. I heard her calling to me.” He glanced up to the old woman. “She said now was the time.”

“Let him go,” Morrigan demanded.

“As if I were holding the boy hostage,” her mother replied, running gauntleted fingers over Kieran’s hair. “She’s always been ungrateful, you see.”

“Ungrateful?!” Morrigan shouted, energy surging along her arms as she summoned. “I know how you plan to extend your life, wicked crone! You will not have me and *you will not have my son!*” She bit the words harshly off of her tongue, her hands lifting as she cast.

The woman was quick to act, yet her composure never faltered. “That’s quite enough,” she said firmly, her eyes glowing a brilliant blue. “You’ll endanger the boy.” With a simple brush of her hand Morrigan’s magic sputtered on her arms, energy sparking in a sharp blast that forced her to stagger backward, struggling to keep her balance. Her eyes widened, shock and anger battling over her features as her mother smiled. “How refreshing, to see my lovely daughter so obedient.”

“What have you done to me?” Morrigan asked in horror.

“I have done nothing,” the old woman replied smoothly. “Nothing that you have not already done to yourself.”

Isii’s brow twisted in confusion, her eyes darting to the witch at her side. “Morrigan, what’s going on?”



“Take caution, Inquisitor. My mother is a witch - and an ancient one at that. An old hag who sustains her unnatural lifespan by possessing the bodies of her daughters.”

Her mother tilted her head, her brow lifting. “That’s what you believe, is it?”

“I found your grimoire. I am no fool, old woman.”

Her mother chuckled again, amused. “Yet here you stand, bound into my service.”

Morrigan’s face paled, her eyes widening. “What?”

“You heard me, girl,” the old woman purred, her lips curved with amusement. “Or do I need to repeat myself?”

Morrigan stared at her, her mouth hanging open in wordless shock, her voice hushed when she finally spoke. “You... are *Mythal*.”

Isii’s stomach sank lower, pooling with fear as she stared at the look of pleasure that warmed the old witch’s face. The face of a human. The face of one of her gods.

*No. She can’t be.*

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Dorian jumped in his seat, startled from his book as he heard one of the doors to Solas’s study slam open, raised voices and the clattering of armor ringing through the rotunda. He snapped his book shut, quick to lift himself to his feet before looking over the banister. Three Inquisition soldiers stood, their swords drawn as they faced down Solas who regarded them calmly from behind his desk.

*Shit.*

Dorian raced down the stairs, his voice already raised in a protesting shout. “What is the meaning of this?” He could feel the aura of lyrium around them even before his foot reached the last step, the soldier’s eyes fixed on the elf.

Templars.

Former Templars, at least, as there were not many who served among their ranks. He recognized one of them - a woman named Lysette, if he recalled correctly. She’d always kept a distrustful distance from him; one of the sort who avoided his gaze and only referred to him by his nationality rather than his name.

“Stay out of this, mage,” one of them snapped, never lifting their gaze from Solas. “We cannot allow a suspected abomination to roam freely while remaining untested.”

“Ah,” Solas muttered, seemingly unmoved by their threatening stance. He smoothed his hands over his desk, his lips pursed momentarily. “Tell me, are you acting on the orders of your Commander?”

Two of them hesitated, their eyes shifting between them, yet Lysette seemed resolved. “If neither the Commander nor the Seeker are willing to act, we will do what is necessary.”

“You have no right to barge in here and-” Dorian halted as Solas lifted his hand, slowly shaking his head before his gaze returned to the soldiers.

“I suppose it is no coincidence that the Inquisitor is absent when you chose to act,” he said. *How is he being so bloody calm? They think he’s a monster, dammit. Mages get lynched for less.*

“We’re taking you to the dungeon,” Lysette said firmly. “By force, if necessary.”

Solas let out a slow breath, turning his attention to Dorian. “Would you please inform Cullen of my whereabouts?” he asked, his voice never wavering. “And make certain word reaches the Inquisitor upon her return.” Dorian nodded, more than a little baffled as he watched Solas step coolly from around his desk, his face drawn yet serene as he approached the soldiers. “Your weapons are unnecessary. I have no intention of fighting you.”

The soldiers seemed uncertain yet did not sheathe their swords, following Solas’s even steps as he walked out of the rotunda, his hands tucked behind the small of his back.

Dorian wasted no time, pushing quickly through the side door that led to the battlements.

Cullen was going to get an earful for not keeping his soldiers in-line.

## Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Ma uthlath - my eternal love

Ma asha’venuralas - my goddess

Ma nuvenin - as you wish

Hope no one minds the suggestive smuttiness at the beginning - I just really felt the need to indulge myself a little more after all that slow burning angst.

This chapter and the next are going to contain healthy amounts of in-game dialogue, reworked to suit my writing.

## Chapter 22

Isii's mind reeled as the old witch stared appraisingly at her daughter, the smugness of her grin curling her thin-lipped mouth. "I was curious to know who drank from the Well of Sorrows. It has been a *very* long time. Imagine my surprise to discover it was you."

"You *can't* be Mythal."

The words came quickly from Isii's tongue. She was almost uncertain that she'd given the thought voice until piercing, golden eyes fixed on her. Amused laughter brushed with cruelty bubbled in the woman's throat as her brows lifted. "Explain to me, dear girl, why I cannot be what I am."

"Mythal is the guardian, the All-Mother. You... you're..."

"Human?" she finished for her.

"A shem."

She smiled warmly. "I assure you, there is little about my life that has been quick, child."

"This is another one of your tricks, mother," Morrigan spat. "Do you *truly* expect me to believe you're some kind of god?"

"You'd be surprised how easily one of my kind may walk among you without your notice." Her eyes fixed a knowing glance onto Isii. There was such an intensity to her presence, something unspoken that made the blood chill in the Inquisitor's veins.

"I do not understand," Morrigan said, baffled. "*How* can you be Mythal?"

"Once I was but a woman, crying out in the lonely darkness for justice," she began, her chin lifting. "And she came to me. A wisp of an ancient being and she granted me *all* I wanted and more. I have carried her through the ages ever since, seeking the justice denied to her."

"That can't be right," Isii said.

A single brow arched on her wrinkled face. "And why not? What *was* Mythal? A legend given name and called a god, or something more? Truth is not the end, but a beginning." Her eyes narrowed, her smile widening. "A fact I've come to understand you've learned already, girl."

Isii froze as Mythal- *no, not Mythal* - approached her, inspecting her with a sharpened level of scrutiny with each slow step. "I hear they call you a herald for the bit of magic that burned its way into your hand. A herald, indeed. Shouting to the Heavens, the harbinger of a new age." She paused, lips pursing slightly, hiding unspoken opinions of the elf before her. "As for me, I have had many names. But you may call me Flemeth."

"Asha'bellanar?" Isii said, unable to hide her shock. "You've been among us all this time... all these years... Why not reveal yourself?"

"And to whom should I reveal myself?"

"To the People. To the Dalish. We've kept the old ways, prayed to you all this time, asked for your aid -"

"And how many of those prayers were answered, hmm?" Flemeth asked. "Should I be blamed if

you carry on with a ritual that you know gains you nothing?”

“But you know so much of what we’ve lost-”

“You know not what you ask of me, child,” she said, her tone lowering as she circled her, still seeming to appraise her like a cat inspecting its prey. “I knew the hearts of mortals well before Mythal ever came to me. It is *why* she came to me. They do not want the truth and I... I am but a shadow, lingering in the sun.”

“So you’re not Mythal,” Isii whispered, her body tense. “You just carry her inside you? Like a spirit?”

“She is me and I am her,” Flemeth said plainly, finishing her path around where Isii stood. “Mythal is a part of me, no more separate than your heart from your chest.” She pressed a gauntleted finger against the front of Isii’s jacket, the sharp point digging into her skin as Flemeth smiled. “Rip it out and we shall see how well you survive,” she finished with a laugh.

“Why should I believe you?” Isii asked stiffly. “Why would Mythal come to you?”

“So many questions,” Flemeth hummed with a grin. “I can see why he is fond of you.” The same clawed finger caught Isii’s chin and she froze. “So young and vibrant. A pretty little thing. And true to your title, you are so *very* inquisitive.” Isii swallowed hard. She knew. Isii could see it plainly on the witch’s face. Not only did she know that Isii knew the truth about Fen’Harel, but she knew about them. Their relationship. Their connection. Had Solas told her? Had he been communicating with her all this time? Had the goddess been spying on them? Or was it something else altogether?

Flemeth withdrew, strolling back to Kieran’s side. “Mythal came to me because we can help one another. Because we both want the same thing.”

“And what’s that?”

Flemeth’s eyes spoke of dark promises as the corner of her lips lifted. “A reckoning that will shake the very heavens.”

“And you follow her whims?” Morrigan asked incredulously. “Do you even know what she truly is?”

Flemeth regarded her daughter with a slight inclination of her head. “You seek to preserve the powers that were, but to what end? It is because *I* taught you, girl. Because things happened that were *never* meant to happen.” Her tone hardened, her composure cracking, tension beneath the surface rising as her voice lifted. “She was betrayed,” she spat sharply, “as *I* was betrayed – as the *world* was betrayed.” Sharpened fingers clasped into a fist as her lips pulled back in a snarl. “Mythal *clawed* and *crawled* her way through the ages to me, and *I will see her avenged!*”

The goddess’s fury echoed through the darkness as the fire in her eyes slowly cooled, her expression weighed with resignation as she shook her head. “Alas, so long as the music plays, we dance.” Her gaze lifted, fixing on Isii. “His missteps may have been the only thing to drag you into this little masquerade, but you are no less a part of it now. He is wise to keep you so close. I wonder, though, what leash he chose to use to keep you at his side.”

Isii wet her lips nervously. She was not bound to the Dread Wolf. They were allies, lovers, but he wasn’t using that to control her. That was real. She was sure of it.

She wanted to be sure of it.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said with as much conviction as she could muster.

Flemeth's expression did not waver. "Oh, but you do, da'len." Her head tilted curiously. "How much has he told you, I wonder? Of what the future holds?"

"Tis nothing but riddles and lies," Morrigan said. "You cannot trust the things she says."

"You hear the voices of the Well, girl. What do they say?"

Morrigan paused, her eyes closing briefly as she furrowed her brow. "They..." She looked back at her mother, her face paling further. "They say you speak the truth."

"His loyalty is not something given easily, sweet girl," Flemeth said to Isii, an odd look of tenderness on her features. "Treasure it while you can."

Isii's eyes flicked over to her advisor as the woman stared back at her, frowning. "So did you simply come here to make Morrigan serve you?"

Flemeth laughed brightly. "Oh, what a servant she would make." She shook her head. "I have no commands for you, girl. Not yet."

"I presume you know what we're up against," Isii said.

"Better than you could possibly imagine."

"Then will you help us?"

Flemeth glanced down to Kieran. "Once I have what I came for."

"No," Morrigan snapped.

"He carries a piece of what once was, snatched from the jaws of darkness," Flemeth said calmly. "You know this."

"He is not your pawn, mother. I will not let you use him!"

"Have you not used him? Was that not your purpose, the reason you agreed to his creation?"

"That was then. Now he... He is my son." Flemeth's gaze softened somewhat as she looked at her daughter, though it was difficult to tell precisely what feeling those eyes portrayed. Sympathy? Or was it a much colder pity that lingered there?

"What do you want with him?" Isii asked. "He's only a child."

Flemeth smiled warmly, running a loving hand over Kieran's head. "And so much better behaved than his mother was at his age."

"I thwarted her attempts to possess me, Inquisitor," Morrigan said, her voice on the edge of panic. "Now she intends to use Kieran instead."

"She says that with such conviction, does she not?" Flemeth asked flatly. "If that is what my daughter believes, then it must be so."

"I will not allow it," Morrigan said.

"And what would you do to stop me, exactly?" Flemeth asked, her hand dipping to Kieran's

shoulder, her thumb caressing his tunic. "My daughter struggles against what she does not understand, Inquisitor. I expected no less of her. Kieran is no ordinary child. I am not the only one carrying the soul of a being long thought lost."

Isii frowned. "What?"

"Urthemiell," Flemeth explained, "or so the men of Tevinter called him. Taken from the archdemon at the final battle of the Fifth Blight." Her smile warmed as she looked down at the boy. "My daughter was very good at following one instruction of mine, at least."

"He is more than that, mother."

Flemeth did not appear moved by Morrigan's plea. "As am I, yet do you hear me complain? Our destinies are not so easily avoided, dear girl."

"Mother," Kieran whined softly. "I have to--"

"You do not belong to her, Kieran," Morrigan said, desperation causing her words to waver. "Neither of us do!"

"If Kieran is so special, why did you wait until now to come for him?" Isii asked.

"I did not know where he was," Flemeth answered simply. "My daughter ran from me, long ago, cleverly hiding him away. I've let them be... until now."

"Twas the Well," Morrigan said, both in disbelief and despair. "It showed you."

"The price of the Well seemed no dire thing when you saw so much gain, hmm?" Flemeth gave her a knowing look, shaking her head. "Foolish girl. Always grasping beyond your reach, despite all that I taught you."

Morrigan's fists clenched at her sides, small wisps of magic crackling against her skin as she growled. "If you did not have this hold over me..."

"Then you would do something even more foolish than threaten me, child," Flemeth said, her voice lowering. "In this place, my power is far greater than yours. *Do not tempt me further.*"

Morrigan's eyes flicked over to her son. "Please," she whispered. "Kieran, I... I cannot lose him."

Flemeth looked down at the boy once more, tipping his chin with her fingers. "As you wish," she began smoothly. "Hear my proposal, dear girl. Let me take the lad, and you are free of me forever. I will never interfere with or harm you again. Or, keep the lad with you... and you will never be safe from me."

"I'll take my chances," Morrigan replied.

Flemeth's features hardened, her tone icy and laced with malice. "I found you once, girl. What makes you think I will not find you again?"

"Is this truly how Mythal treats her children?" Isii asked. "Or is it Flemeth who would be so cruel?"

She appeared amused by that, though there was little mirth in her grin. "Your legends do paint a rather flattering image, da'len. But do not mistake them for the truth. I will have my due."

"He returns with me," Morrigan insisted.

“Decided so quickly?” Flemeth asked.

“Do whatever you wish,” Morrigan snapped. “Take over my body now, if you must. But Kieran will be free of your clutches. He will be better off without me, just as I was better off without you. I am many things, but I will *not* the mother you were to me.”

Flemeth flinched, a genuine look of pain washing over her wizened face as the corners of her lips sagged. Her eyes lowered to Kieran’s, lightly brushing hair back from his brow.

“Are you ready, child?” she asked calmly.

Kieran nodded as she gently took his hands in her own. Before Morrigan could object, a glowing orb emerged from the boy’s chest, casting a sharp blue light across his face. He peered at it curiously as it drifted up toward Flemeth, the witch offering him a comforting smile as it disappeared, slipping under her skin with the shimmering sigh of magical energy.

He seemed to understand what had happened far better than Isii did in that moment. The Inquisitor watched them, utterly baffled as the boy’s face lifted hopefully, looking up at his grandmother. “No more dreams?” he asked.

Flemeth’s grin softened. “No more dreams,” she reassured him.

He smiled broadly and when he turned to join his mother, Flemeth offered no resistance. Morrigan wrapped her arms around him protectively, holding him close to her chest, her lips pressed into his hair.

“A soul is not forced upon the unwilling, Morrigan,” Flemeth said as her daughter looked up. “You were never in any danger from me,” she added softly. Morrigan frowned, her eyes widening as Flemeth nodded calmly. “Listen to the voices, child. They will teach you,” she said, turning to leave, “as I never did.”

“Wait!” Morrigan called after her.

“You should not delay, Inquisitor,” Flemeth said, glancing back over her shoulder. “I suspect your presence is needed elsewhere.” Black smoke began to billow around her legs, creeping up along her hips as she paused, studying Isii once more. “I will be interested to see where your path takes you. Step carefully, da’len - and we just might see each other again.” She smiled then, smoke curling along her cheeks as her body began to fade from view. “Do take good care of him. He does not do well when left alone.”

Then, she was gone - leaving nothing but shadows in her wake.

“Who did she keep referring to?”

Isii turned to face Morrigan, the witch’s face twisted in confusion as the Inquisitor shook her head.

“I don’t know,” she lied.

It was a weak denial - one that Morrigan did not seem to accept, yet she said nothing more as they made their way back to the eluvian.

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The mirror hummed as they passed through, light streaming into the small storage room as they walked back into Skyhold.

“Are you alright, Kieran?” Morrigan asked softly, running a tender hand through his hair. “You are not hurt?”

“I feel lonely.”

Morrigan’s brow tightened in concern before she leaned forward, kissing him on the head. “Go on, boy. I shall meet you in the gardens in a moment.” She watched him go, her arms crossing over her chest. “She wanted the Old God soul all along,” she murmured quietly.

“What will she do with it?”

“I am as lost for an answer as you, Inquisitor,” Morrigan said helplessly. “Kieran had a destiny - and now it appears to lie within my mother’s hands. We shall have to wait and see what she does with it.” She sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. “Is it worth reminding myself that perhaps I do not know everything after all? My mother has the soul of an elven goddess - or whatever Mythall truly was - and her plans are unknown to me.”

“You truly had no idea what she was?” Isii pressed.

“I knew she kept the truth from me. I even suspected that she was not truly human... but this?” Morrigan said with an exasperated wave of her hand. “I always thought the so-called Elvhen Gods were little more than glorified rulers, but now I have doubt. And doubt... is an uncomfortable thing,” she admitted, shifting in her stance.

“Just be thankful you did not drink from the Well,” Morrigan continued, her tone as bitter as it was wistful. “I am evidently tied to my mother for all eternity.” Morrigan scoffed as she closed the eluvian. “That undoubtedly pleases her. When next I see her, I shall have no choice but to do every single thing she commands.”

“I’m sorry, Morrigan,” Isii said. “I should have insisted-”

“You did what you could to dissuade me,” Morrigan said flatly. “The fault is my own. I am... not pleased to admit it, but it appears Solas was right after all.” She gazed out the door toward the gardens, her teeth slowly working over her lip as she thought. “And I suppose he would know, wouldn’t he?”

Isii paused, her lips forming cautiously around unspoken words before she cleared her throat. “A lucky guess. None of us knew what the price of the Well truly meant-”

“Do not act as though I am a fool, Inquisitor,” Morrigan said sharply, her eyes narrowing. “I have had enough of that sort of treatment from my mother, I do not need to add to it with your clumsy attempts at lying.”

Isii remained silent, uncertain about what she should say as Morrigan’s eyes studied her. “I did not see it before. Perhaps I did not wish to see. But his fluency with the ancient tongue, the way the Sentinels regarded him in the temple... I thought perhaps his choice of form during battle was merely an homage to the wolf that was once so feared and held with such reverence - but no. Tis not an allusion to mythology at all, is it? He is the one my mother referred to. The one keeping you so close.”

Isii’s mouth went dry as she scrambled for something to say, some denial to make - but nothing came. “You can’t let anyone else know,” she said quietly.

The witch ran a hand over her face, her brow creased tightly. “So Mythall is my mother and the Dread Wolf is the pretentious elf who has been vexing me for months on end. And even the



knowledge of the Well left me blind to both.” She took a resigned breath. “All my years hunting for arcane mysteries... and I do not even see them when they are standing right in front of my eyes.”

“*Please*, Morrigan.”

“I will keep your secret,” she said begrudgingly as she began to walk toward the gardens. “I have no interest in involving myself with that blighted pantheon any more than I already am. Besides, Mythal alone is enough to contend with. Pray my mother is not leading us both astray, Inquisitor. She is not above doing so for her own amusement.”

“For what it’s worth, I think you did the right thing,” Isii said, following her. “Protecting your son.”

“Did I? She was testing me,” Morrigan said, “and I cannot tell whether I passed.”

“Inquisitor!”

The voice rang out within moments of Isii stepping into the hallway that surrounded the gardens. She turned to see a messenger running quickly to her side. “Master Pavus sent me to fetch you as soon as you returned.”

“Another emergency?” Isii asked dryly.

“Solas has been taken into custody,” he answered.

Isii’s eyes widened, her expression hardening as she immediately picked up her pace. “Under whose authority?” she snapped.

“I... don’t know,” the messenger said haltingly. “Master Pavus simply said you were needed in the dungeon at once.”

Isii cursed sharply, breaking out into a sprint.

She should have brought Fen’Harel with her through the eluvian. She shouldn’t have let him out of her sight. Visions of the tests Cullen had so delicately avoided describing in detail ran rampant through her mind’s eye - stripping him of his magic, torturing him to draw the demon out, to force him to defend himself as proof that he was possessed...

She swallowed down the acid in her throat, hoping that she wasn’t too late.

Raised voices echoed off the stone walls as Isii’s footfalls raced down the stairs, fear and anger catching tightly in her throat as she made her way toward the holding cells.

“Stop this at once. That’s an order. You have no right-”

“We have *every* right, Commander!” a woman shouted, cutting off Cullen’s objection, her words thickened by her Orlesian accent. “You of all people know what this could lead to if this abomination unleashed its true form. He could decimate the leadership of the Inquisition within seconds.”

“We do not know that he is possessed.”

“Which is why he is being tested. Are you really going to let the Inquisitor hold you back from doing what you *know* must be done?”

*He is being tested.*

The words seized in Isii's chest, her mana swelling, rage bubbling to the surface as she reached the last step, charging into the room with fury in her eyes.

*"What do you think you're doing?"* she bellowed.

The soldiers froze - even Cullen seemed to stiffen under the harsh command of her voice, though he was clearly not the target of her ire, his sword already drawn on his insubordinates. The woman who had been arguing with him stood at his side, her eyes wide as her fellow conspirators stood in the cell behind her, both stiff-backed and standing at attention. Fen'Harel knelt at their feet - bound, bruised and bloodied, his back hunched and his breaths unsteady. Yet his composure remained strangely intact as his eyes met Isii's through the iron bars, his face retaining its calm reserve despite the sheen of sweat that covered it. Though his expression was grim, there seemed to be an odd reassurance in his gaze.

He could have run. She knew full well that he could have destroyed them and disappeared with little effort and yet he didn't. He'd allowed this to happen. He submitted to it.

*"Open the cell,"* Isii demanded icily. *"Now."*

To their credit, they did not hesitate to obey, though she saw the looks of uncertainty shared among the soldiers as the lock was released, the heavy metal gate swinging open. She pushed past them, barking orders for the soldiers to step back as she knelt in front of Solas, lifting his chin gently with a light brush of her hand. His injuries appeared shallow - his lip split and swollen, fresh bruises forming along his cheek where she was certain gauntleted fists had struck him. Thin cuts grazed his shoulder and right arm, blood soaked through the pale, rough cloth of his tunic. She could sense the rippling in the Veil around him - the aftereffects of a holy smite meant to strip him of his magic. She clenched her jaw tightly, holding back the stinging in her eyes as she glared at those responsible.

*"They acted of their own accord,"* Cullen explained quietly. *"I did not order them to do this, Inquisitor. Apparently the rumors of his possession had spread further than I'd anticipated."*

*"And are you satisfied now?"* she snarled at the three of them. The two men appeared unwilling to reply. The woman in their party seemed appropriately shaken, her voice hesitant as she spoke.

*"We were not able to complete the test-"*

*"You've put him through enough already,"* Isii snapped, cutting her off. *"Did he even once fight back or give you any indication that he was possessed?"*

The soldier blanched, her eyes lowering as she shook her head. *"No, Inquisitor. He did not."*

*"Then that's your proof,"* she spat. She eyed Cullen sharply. *"Please escort these three to the main hall. I will sit in judgement when I'm good and ready. Don't hesitate to throw them in chains if they will not cooperate."*

*"Inquisitor-"*

*"You knowingly and willingly assaulted another member of the Inquisition,"* Isii said, talking over the soldier's objection. *"I refuse to overlook the safety of those who serve me, no matter what your reasons were. Is that understood?"*

Their silence weighed heavily in the air, but they eventually responded with resigned nods. They offered no resistance as Cullen led them away.

“They took no joy in this, vhenan,” Solas murmured quietly. “They were only doing what they thought was necessary.”

Isii turned again to face him, caressing his cheek as she leaned forward, nuzzling his brow with her own. “Are you alright?”

“I will be fine,” he said calmly, a faint tremor of magic slipping down his arms as she watched his restraints give way. She frowned, her head tilting as he brought a soothing hand to the side of her neck.

“I thought they stripped you of your magic. I felt the smite-”

“They made their attempts. I did little to discourage their assumption that it had worked,” he answered simply. “I was never in any danger, Isii. I could have stopped them at any time.”

“Then why-”

“What was the alternative? Attack them and flee?” He shook his head. “I could endure it. Perhaps now those who suspect me will see this as proof enough of my innocence. Especially if you make their judgement a public affair.” Isii let out a slow breath, nodding. “Did you retrieve Lady Morrigan?”

“Yes,” she said, helping him to his feet. “Kieran was lured into the Fade and Morrigan chased after him.”

His brow furrowed. “The eluvian took you physically into the Fade?”

She nodded again, chewing on her lip. “Morrigan’s mother set the whole thing up. Apparently she wanted to see her grandson... and the person who drank from her well.”

His face screwed tightly with confusion before a sense of understanding washed slowly over his features. Much to her surprise, he laughed - *hard*. A bright and solid sound that shook his shoulders as the palm of his hand pressed to the bridge of his nose.

She peered at him, her head tilting. “What’s so funny?”

“Morrigan is one of Mythal’s daughters,” he said, lips peeled back in a grin as he shook his head, his eyes drifting down as he idly rubbed the rope burn from his wrists. “I can’t say I was aware of that... though it certainly does explain a lot.”

“She knows who you are,” Isii said. “I didn’t tell her but... with some of the things Mythal said, it wasn’t too difficult for Morrigan to figure it out. The All-Mother apparently knows about us. Our relationship.”

“Unsurprising,” he said, far more dismissively than she would have expected. “She sees much - there is very little that can remain hidden from her for long.”

“So you didn’t tell her?”

“Do not take this the wrong way, sa’lath - but even if I’d had the opportunity to, I doubt she would look very kindly on that.” An odd smile crossed over his mouth, followed quickly by a wince as he ran an inspective finger over the split skin of his lip.

“Are you sure you’re alright? I can get a healer to tend to your wounds.”

“No need,” he said simply, stepping slowly out of the cell as she followed him. “I would heal them myself, were I not still wishing to give the impression that they stripped me of my magic. It might even do some good for others to see the evidence of my testing.” He paused, shooting a concerned look toward her as they slowly ascended the stairs. “Their judgement is in your hands, of course. But I would advise you not to use their punishment as a petty form of revenge. While they should have gone to their Commander with their concerns, they were only acting on their fear of a perceived threat.”

“You’d defend them?” she asked, frowning. “After what they did to you?”

“I am merely suggesting that you treat their transgressions as you would those against any other member of the Inquisition. What they did to me was nothing in comparison to what they could have attempted. They at least took pains to prove their suspicions. They could have simply tried to kill me.”

She let out a slow sigh, nodding. “I suppose.”

He paused as they neared the door, turning to place a soft kiss against her brow - doing his best to halt the expression of pain that caused his nose to crease sharply at the small stinging in his lip. “I will see you tonight, vhenan,” he whispered, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Hopefully now we can put all of this behind us - and place our focus on Corypheus, as it should be.”

She nodded, giving his hand a gentle squeeze before she pushed past the barrier, walking briskly toward the main hall.

## Chapter 23

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Consciousness did not return easily. Isii groaned, shifting groggily at the warm press of a kiss on her cheek, cloth shifting against her stomach as a hand smoothed against it.

“It’s time,” Solas whispered softly.

Isii frowned, grumbling as she hugged his arm, choosing instead to roll onto her side, dragging him with her as she pressed her face into her pillow. He chuckled softly at her unspoken refusal, nudging his chin into the crook of her neck.

“Vhenan-”

“Go back to sleep,” she muttered.

“It is almost daybreak,” he said softly, his fingers toying with the cloth of his tunic which was currently wrapped around her form. “I’m going to need this back.”

“No.” The word came out as more of a grunt than anything else. His lips went to her ear, then to the spot behind it that made her squirm, letting out a frustrated huff.

“That’s not fair.”

“You can go back to sleep as soon as you get out of my clothes.”

She rolled over, peering up at him. He was shirtless, though otherwise dressed. He’d clearly already gotten out of bed to prepare before waking her. “I don’t see why you still have to leave so early,” she said, frowning. “Would it really be so terrible for someone to see you come out of my room? The matter with those Templars is settled. Everyone heard that you were tested. Those rumors have been put to bed.”

The Dread Wolf looked down at her sympathetically, brushing a stray curl from her brow. “Just for a little while longer, emm’asha,” he whispered. “Trust me, I am looking forward to a time where we don’t feel the need to hide what we are to each other.”

“That time can be now,” Isii said.

“Only a day past the judgement of your soldiers?” he asked, his brow lifting. “We both know how that would appear to those who were so quick to distrust me.”

She let out a slow sigh, letting her head sink deeper into her pillows. “I suppose.”

She’d consciously made the trial of her wayward soldiers a very public matter. Isii had forced them to describe precisely what they had done to Solas; how they threatened him with blades drawn even though he offered no resistance, how they smited him to neutralize his magic and then beat him to force the demon they assumed was inside him to expose itself. She had Cullen state before the court that these were methods commonly used by Templars and had him list the signs one must look for that would confirm a possession had taken place. She then pressed the soldiers who stood before her with questions that left them no ground but to admit that Solas did not meet their criteria. For all those present who heard their testimony, there was no question of his innocence. He had

passed their test and any rumors of his compromised nature were nothing more than hearsay and supposition. She told all those in attendance that this was a matter of grave importance. The Inquisition was to be a safe haven for the mages who served it - mages without whom she never would have been able to close the Breach. She had offered them amnesty in Redcliffe and she could not, in good faith, disregard their safety at the hands of their comrades.

Isii felt she had been merciful in terms of their punishment. They were each given the option to leave the Inquisition or to take new positions among their forces at the lowest rank and prove their willingness to serve. To their credit, they each took their demotions with grace and promised to prove themselves worthy of her trust.

Fen'Harel tipped his head down, kissing along the sliver of her collarbone that was exposed by his tunic's deep neckline. "Grant me a few more days," he requested, pulling her closer. She allowed him to move her until she was seated over his lap, his hands shifting the cloth up above the swell of her hips. "Then, you and I can be more public with our affections. Perhaps you'll allow me to reward your patience by taking a trip with me. Just the two of us. A brief escape from our responsibilities where we might indulge in one another."

"A trip?" she asked, her tone warming as his lips trailed down, peppering kisses over her breasts through the thin cloth. "Where?"

"A great many places, assuming we can slip away through Lady Morrigan's eluvian," he murmured. "But if not?" He paused to hum thoughtfully, his hands lowering to grope a generous helping of bare flesh. "There is a spot in Crestwood I would be eager to show you."

"Crestwood?" she asked incredulously. "I could think of far more romantic getaways than some soggy spot in Crestwood."

"Perhaps you're right," he said, the corner of his lips lifting. "Besides, the wyverns that have been residing there have tarnished the ambiance somewhat."

Isii laughed, lips parting to reply but her words were swallowed in a pained gasp as the anchor flared sharply in her palm. Her body jerked with surprise and his hold on her tightened reflexively as she gripped the mark with her opposite hand, pressing her thumb against the throbbing ache. Before either of them could voice any concern or confusion, a concussive blast rumbled in the distance, the force of which shuddered through Skyhold mere seconds later. Panes of glass rattled in their framing as she turned her head, the pre-dawn sky beyond brightening with a green mockery of sunlight.

"No," she whispered, choking on her dread as she scrambled off of her lover, all but throwing herself onto her balcony with the speed of her steps. She grasped the railing as she tilted her chin skyward, a chorus of startled voices filtering up from the castle grounds below.

The Breach churned in the distance, the clouds catching the eerie glow of the Fade as it bled through the angry, open wound.

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"Inquisitor, we only have limited forces at the moment," Cullen said. "The bulk of our army has still not returned from the Arbor Wilds."

"Understood," Isii replied curtly, her pace quickening as they strode the length of the main hall. The early hour did little to prevent Skyhold from being filled with a chaotic din by the time Isii and Solas had dressed and emerged from her chambers. Residents poured into the keep, frightened and

looking for explanations she could not give. There was no hope of Solas quietly slipping out of her bedroom surreptitiously as he had planned, though in truth it mattered little to her now. If anyone was paying attention to who had warmed her bed last night, their priorities were in serious need of readjustment.

“Get every non-combative resident of Skyhold secured in the lower level,” Isii continued. “I assume the wards that protect this place are working; otherwise Corypheus would have sprung a direct attack. But I don’t want to take any risks.”

“It will be done,” Josephine said, trailing behind her.

“Whatever current forces we have here and anyone else willing and able to bear arms will move into the Valley of Sacred Ashes with me,” Isii added.

“We should wait for our army to return-”

“There’s no time for that, Commander,” Isii said, cutting him off. “The longer we wait, the larger the Breach will grow.” She stole a glance down to her palm, the anchor pulsing like an unnatural heartbeat. “It is less stable than before. I can feel it. My guess is he’s actively using the orb to accelerate its expansion.”

“But why?” Josephine asked. “Would he not die as well, if the Breach destroys everything?”

“He knows this is a threat that we cannot afford to ignore,” the Dread Wolf explained. “By putting the world in peril once more, he hopes to force the Inquisitor to walk into whatever trap he has laid for her in the valley.”

“I don’t see any alternative,” Isii said, shooting a worried glance to Solas. Though his features appeared far calmer than most, she could see the genuine fear that lingered in his eyes as they met her own.

“He will do whatever he can to kill you,” Fen’Harel added softly. “You know that.”

She forced a mirthless smirk onto her lips. “He can try.”

She could not look her lover in the eye and tell him how this day would end. Better to let him believe in her confidence, however false it was.

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Isii bore down in her saddle, thighs tight along the sides of her mount as she rode. The Swiftwind huffed beneath her, breaths sharp and labored as it flew over the rough terrain of the mountainside. The ride into the valley was not a brief one, but the promise of daylight was left unfulfilled, the sun’s rays choked out by thick, dark clouds. Isii tried to steady herself, blocking out everything but the heavy rumble of her hart’s hooves striking stone, the sound of the riders following close behind, the thunderous, percussive rhythm of their strides as they raced toward the inevitable. This fight was bound to happen one day. This was the fate she’d doomed herself to the very first second she grasped the orb. Each time she’d faced Corypheus, she had barely escaped with her life. Maybe a martyr’s death was the unavoidable end for the Herald of Andraste. The way the story was always meant to conclude. She swallowed hard as tears stung her eyes, blinking back the burn as it threatened to blur her vision.

Her parents would have been proud of her if they could see her now. She wasn’t living the quiet life among the Dalish they’d imagined or hoped for. She was so much more than the little girl they’d known. Someone who had an army of followers. An elf who held the fate of the world in

the palm of her hand. And if any of the legends were true, maybe she would be seeing them again far sooner than she had predicted. With that acknowledgement came a strange sense of peace on top of the roiling terror that lingered in the depths of her resolve.

She would stop Corypheus. She would return the orb to its rightful owner and the world would be made whole again. She would save her people. No matter the cost.

Their formation shifted as they drew closer to the fray. Their meager forces had ridden ahead and were met with a crushing resistance. Rifts lit the sky, demons surging forward, their bloodlust fixing on whatever first fell into their path. Horses screamed as their bodies were assaulted, riders falling to the ground, some of whom were unlucky enough to be pinned by their wounded mounts as their attackers went in for the kill. Swords caught the green pallor of the Breach, arcing high before sinking into flesh, the scent of blood and ichor turning her stomach as Isii pressed forward. Her hart had little trouble bounding over the fallen, foe and friend alike, letting out a trumpetous bellow as it charged. It showed no fear and so Isii tried to be equally fearless as she hurtled toward the looming figure that stood atop a set of crumbling steps, the red glow of Fen'Harel's orb casting jagged shadows across his malformed face.

"Tell me, Herald," Corypheus shouted across the distance. "Where is your Maker now?"

Sera answered with a volley of arrows, a quick-fire burst from horseback as she drew within range, the hard thwack of Bianca answering in kind. Lightning coursed down Isii's staff as she felt the heat of flames whoosh past her, barreling toward the Magister. A flash of blinding red light billowed out from the Magister seconds later, a cry catching in Isii's throat. She hit the ground before she could even process the wave of force that struck her from her mount, her hart squawking loudly as it was knocked from its feet. Corypheus remained unmoved as Isii scrambled to right herself, running instinctively to close the distance, not waiting to see who among her party was ready to follow.

"Call to him," he continued, taunting. "Call down his wrath upon me."

"Shut it!" she heard Sera shout, her voice sounding distant behind her.

"You cannot, for he does not exist," the Magister announced, his voice dripping with disdain. "I shall deliver you from this lie in which you linger. Bow before your new god and be spared."

"I don't give a damn about the Maker. He was never mine to call." Isii lifted her chin, feet planted as she gripped her staff. "I know the god I serve," she spat. "And he is far more than you could ever hope to be." His eyes narrowed sharply, nostrils flaring as he seethed. If he expected her to tremble in fear, he was to be sorely disappointed. She would not give him the satisfaction. "This ends now."

"And so it shall," he snarled.

He swept his arms wide, the orb hovering over his outstretched fingers. The ground beneath them groaned as the mountain began to pull apart. Isii fell, forced to brace herself on her hands and knees as the ruins shook, swaying like a ship set adrift on choppy seas. She feared for a moment that he intended to rend the stone and bury them all - a petty revenge for his defeat at Haven. But when she stole a glance behind her, she saw the true nature of his spell. The skeletal remains of the temple rose into the sky, hunks of the mountainside mimicking the impossible shapes of the Fade. Her party was split, many of her followers now trapped on the ground below and unable to do anything but watch and pray. She was left with only Cassandra, Dorian, Bull and the Dread Wolf to fight at her side. She silently prayed Cole was among them and merely hidden from sight.



"I knew you would come," Corypheus said. "I knew your pride would not let you linger in hiding, safe in your castle and far from my reach. We shall prove here, once and for all, which of us is worthy of godhood."

"You're not proving anything by talking," Isii spat. A deep, resonant growl rumbled from behind the Magister, the heavy scraping of claws on stone announcing the presence of his dragon as it slowly stalked over the ramparts, its body previously obscured by the ruins. She took a breath, bracing herself as the dragon's eyes fixed on her, muscles tensing as it readied itself to strike. With a roar, it lunged forward just as she felt the Veil ripple behind her, Fen'Harel's arm clasp tightly against her stomach and dragging her backwards in a Fade step. Before the dragon could hit the ground and recoil, a flash of wine-colored scales dove into sight, driving itself into the beast's side. A tangle of limbs sent the two dragons hurtling away, heavy bodies slamming into crumbling stone as the corrupted creature screeched furiously, its attacker's teeth sinking into its throat.

*Go! I will take care of this beast.* Isii heard the voice ringing through her head, her eyes widening.

"Morrigan?" she asked haltingly.

*I said I would match his dragon, did I not?* Her thoughts bore the same chastising tone the woman so commonly employed as the dragon she inhabited tore at bloodied skin, the false archdemon pulling free long enough to take wing. *Buy me enough time to kill this creature and Corypheus's mockery of immortality shall be disrupted. Now go!*

"A dragon?" Corypheus sneered, his eyes narrowing as Morrigan rose into the air in pursuit of the fleeing creature. "How clever of you. It will avail you nothing, Herald. I will tear it from the sky."

His hands lifted again but Isii was quick to cast, lightning sizzling as it met its mark in the center of his chest, curling around his form. It sputtered against his barrier, doing little harm and yet forcing him to stagger backward. He whirled around to face her, his arms lifting to summon before his body jerked, an enraged scream tearing from his lips as an unseen blade sank into the small of his back. Cole shifted, barely visible save for a brief glimmer of green light as two more strikes sunk into the Magister's ribs, the spirit withdrawing quickly to avoid the flailing arm that tried to bat him away.

"Insolent gnat!" The distraction served its purpose, giving Morrigan enough time to draw further away from Corypheus. The dragons were on their own now. "Very well," he bellowed. "I shall deal with you instead."

There was a flash of red and a flurry of movement as Corypheus charged her with a fade step, nearly on top of her in the blink of an eye with his arm raised, slashing downward. Isii ducked instinctively, reeling back as she swung her staff around, catching the flesh under his arm with the bladed tip of her weapon. She felt a barrier suddenly take form around her, no doubt Fen'Harel's doing, as the Magister roared, retaliating with a blast of energy that knocked her off of her feet. The barrier held, but the heat of it was searing, fire and electricity tearing across her body. She could feel the corruption in his magic, the living taint dwelling in the very core of his power and the sensation nearly made her retch.

Isii hit the ground, skittering in the dirt, gasping for breath as her lungs suffered through the impact. Bull charged, teeth bared in a vicious snarl as he swung his axe. It met nothing but black, choking smoke, cutting through the afterimage of Corypheus's frame as he teleported away. Bull let out a frustrated grunt. "Coward!" he shouted.

"What do they call you? A qunari?" The Magister's voice resonated off the stone further into the ruins. Cassandra's eyes lifted before she pointed to higher ground, Corypheus's form looming like

an inky shadow over a broken balustrade before drawing out of sight. “Your blood is engorged with decay! Your race is not a race. It is a mistake!” Isii pushed herself to her feet, helped in no small part by Dorian tugging sharply on her arm as the group gave chase, following Corypheus deeper into the maze of his own making. “You were a fool to come, Iron Bull. You shall be slaughtered like your namesake.”

Bull laughed. “Big threats,” he called out to him as they reached the clearing where the Magister stood, energy surging up his arms as he summoned. “Let’s see if you can back them up.”

“Bull, wait!” He didn’t heed Isii’s warning and instead charged with a roar only to be caught in a beam of crimson light as the Magister discharged his spell. The shock sent Bull to his knees, collapsing as his body convulsed. He heaved himself behind some debris for cover, cursing as he thumbed open a healing potion. He grimaced as the liquid poured down his throat, chucking the empty vial away with a hiss. Corypheus lifted the orb and the Veil tore, buckling under the strain as four rage demons were pulled through the newly-formed rift. Cassandra turned to meet the new threat but Solas shouted at her, already dropping his staff as smoke curled around his form.

“Focus your efforts on the Magister! I will tend to the rest.” Fen’Harel launched himself at the first demon, his body shifting form before he drove it to the ground under the weight of the Wolf, his teeth rending its screams into a choked gurgle. She knew he may not be able to risk biting a blighted creature like Corypheus without becoming infected himself, but the demons were clearly fair game.

Isii focused on closing the rift as Cassandra charged Corypheus, catching another one of his attacks on her shield before swinging her sword. “You think to challenge me, Seeker?” he hissed, side-stepping her blade as shards of red lyrium jutted sharply from the ground beneath her. The warrior barely had time to move, falling in her attempt to dodge but quickly rolling to her feet, grounding herself to make another attack. “I will crush you. I swear it. A pike shall hold your head before the gates of the Grand Cathedral.”

“We shall see about that,” she spat. She feigned an upward strike, slashing low as he took the bait, Corypheus lurching back as he snarled. Bull had climbed onto his feet once more, circling around to cut off the Magister’s room to retreat as Cole flashed briefly into sight, taking another swipe at Corypheus’s side.

“Begone, demon!” he snarled, lashing out at the spirit as he faded once more from view. “I shall plunge your essence into an abyss from which it will never return!”

“You *can’t* hurt me.” Cole’s voice echoed, thin and spectral, wavering despite his determination. Corypheus could not bind him. Solas had made sure of that - but it didn’t sound as if Cole was completely convinced.

The rift closed with a thunderous crack as Isii cast a quick glance toward Solas. Only one demon remained standing, but it would not last much longer. Ichor-stained jaws closed around the back of its neck, the Dread Wolf dragging the demon off-balance as he instinctively shook his head, aiming to snap its neck.

The ground beneath Corypheus flared into life, a sigil taking shape mere moments before Dorian’s flames engulfed him. Corypheus let out an enraged howl as his barrier gave way under the assault, blades quickly sinking into his flesh as his guard dropped. He swung his arm wide, batting Cassandra aside and giving himself the room he needed to fade step, a flash of red shuddering through the air.

“You shall be dealt with harshly, Tevinter!” Corypheus bellowed. “The Imperium suffers no

traitors.” Energy surged along his arms, veins of light coursing over his skin before he unleashed a punishing beam toward Dorian.

“Kadan, *get down!*” Bull shouted, throwing himself forward in a sprint. He barreled into Dorian’s side, sending the mage sprawling into the dirt as the full force of the blighted magic coursed into the qunari. Bull roared, ferocious agony tearing from his throat as the blast knocked him off of his feet. Isii whirled her staff over her head, sending a salvo of elemental shocks into the Magister’s back as the Dread Wolf launched the full weight of his form into Corypheus, pinning him to the ground. Soon there was nothing more than smoke billowing out from beneath his paws as the Magister teleported to safety once more.

Dorian rushed to Bull’s side as leathery wings thundered overhead. The corrupted dragon shrieked as Morrigan bit savagely into its hindquarter, twisting to grapple with her as the pair hurled into a nearby tower, stone cracking and giving way under their weight.

“Bull!” The mercenary let out a huffed breath in response, struggling to push himself up. Dorian helped him roll onto his back, the qunari hissing as raw skin hit the dirt. “You idiot! You could have gotten yourself killed. What were you thinking?!”

“You’re welcome,” Bull muttered, offering him a weak smirk. Dorian’s brow lifted, some small amount of relief in his features as he fished into the satchel on his belt, pulling out a health potion.

The battle raging in the sky continued as the dragons doubled back, their path sending them twisting and spiraling through the charred ruins. Morrigan writhed, her body contorting as she pulled herself free from the beast’s claws, her wings spreading wide. With an echoing shriek, she flew toward the Breach. Higher and higher she climbed, the blighted dragon pursuing her, their forms silhouetted by the blinding green light. Morrigan’s wings stilled, her head swiveling as she turned to face her opponent. Like a bird of prey she tucked her limbs tightly to her sides, allowing gravity to hurl her toward her adversary, picking up speed in her free fall. At the last second, she lifted her hind legs, claws outstretched to sink into the waiting flesh of Corypheus’s dragon. The creature screamed as she sank past hardened scales, the beasts falling in a tangled mass. Their jaws snapped at one another, claws slashing and tearing as the ground grew steadily closer. The corrupted dragon caught one of Morrigan’s wings with its talons, slashing a gaping hole as she wailed, the two of them falling into an uncontrolled tailspin.

With a sickening wet crunch, the dragons hit the ground, the witch crushed beneath the Magister’s thrall. Isii rushed over to the edge of the parapet, looking down at the wreckage as two broken bodies sluggishly rolled away from one another. Morrigan’s giant neck shivered, trembling as she tried to lift her head, straining muscles giving way as the sheer weight of her body forced her back into the dirt. Soon the form itself melted away and the witch lay face down, small and human, her body torn and bloodied.

“Morrigan!” Isii shouted, but the woman did not stir. Corypheus’s dragon let out a gurgling rumble, the sound skittering in its throat as it slowly dragged itself to its feet. “She needs help,” Isii said, gripping her staff as she turned toward the stairs. Fen’Harel blocked her path, his six eyes narrowing.

“Continue to pursue Corypheus,” he said, the Wolf’s lips unmoving as the inhuman voice rolled off of him like distant thunder. “He is wounded and we should not allow him time to rally. I will take care of the dragon.”

“Alone?” she asked, her chest tightening. He could die. He’d said as much himself. Images of his lifeless body flashed through her memory, his blood slickening the stone in Redcliffe’s ill-fated future. There was a time she could have convinced herself that it was all a ruse or that he would

have regenerated, risen again, taken a new form, however such things worked for a god. Now, she knew those were just hollow comforts. His gaze flicked over to Cassandra, his canine head tilting.

“Care to join me, Seeker?” he asked. “A wounded dragon should not pose much of a challenge to a Pentaghast.” She nodded, adjusting her grip on her sword. His eyes settled on Isii once more as he gave a small bow of his head. “Stay safe, vhenan.”

She swallowed hard, nodding. “You too.” He loped away then, leaping smoothly over the edge of the cracked stone wall. The height would have been insurmountable, were he a normal wolf, but he landed gracefully, his ears already folded back as he growled, setting himself between the dragon and the fallen witch. Cassandra didn’t hesitate, jogging quickly to the stairs and racing down to meet him.

Bull pushed himself to his feet. While the healing potion had done its work, his skin was still marred, mottled with faint white scars from where the magic had coursed over his body. He tilted his head, the motion met with a satisfying crack as he stretched his neck, hefting his axe over his shoulder. “Ready to do this, boss?”

Isii nodded and they continued upward, scaling the tower in search of Corypheus. They found him in the very center of what was once a grand chamber, the Breach billowing overhead. The orb hung suspended above him, crimson waves of light snapping over the smooth, carved surface. Broken pillars showed the framework of what once were large, sloping arches, their circle now forming a dilapidated arena. Chipped mosaic tiles glittered beneath his feet, a churning torrent of blight magic surrounding him. He unleashed it as soon as they came into view, a concussive wave that forced them to scatter. Bull and Dorian managed to throw themselves behind cover, Cole blinking out of sight as Isii summoned a barrier with barely enough time to catch the brunt of the blow. The force pressed the air from her lungs but she braced herself on her feet, knees bent as she charged her staff. As she rose her weapon to swing, Corypheus lifted his hand, fingers outstretched toward the orb. The mark flared painfully in her palm, forcing her to drop her staff, screaming as heat flooded her arm. It felt as though she was burning, flames coursing under her skin. She collapsed, clutching her hand as light poured from the scar. She recognized this feeling. It was the same pain she’d felt in Haven when he tried to remove the mark. Corypheus did not stop to gloat. He surged forward, fade stepping to close the distance as he grasped a fistful of her hair, yanking her to her feet. Clawed fingers thrust into her gut, twisting as he ripped through her flesh. The pain was so intense she could not even scream, eyes wide as her mouth dropped open, gasping for breath.

It had all taken a matter of seconds.

She cast instinctively, driven by terror and self-preservation, a barrage of elemental energy sinking into him. He dropped her and flew back, flames chasing after him as Dorian cursed, summoning wildly. Bull rose to swing but his axe never met its mark, the Magister teleporting through the field, warping the Veil to propel his form as Cole struggled to chase after him.

“Your efforts here are meaningless,” he bellowed, beams of red luminescence pouring from his hands, sweeping the open circle of stones. “You will die this day, but I will live on. I will always live on. I am eternal, endless, while your pitiful lives mean nothing. You may have delayed my ascension, but I will simply start again. Long after your bones have turned to dust, I will remain. I will sit on the throne of the Black City and I will give this world the god it deserves.”

Isii clutched at her stomach, hot blood seeping between her fingers as she reached into her belt, retrieving a health potion. It stung as it hit her throat but only managed to slow the gory tide that now trickled beneath her leathers.

It wouldn’t be enough - but it would buy her some time.

She pushed herself to her feet, gritting her teeth at the pain as she scooped up her staff. She prayed to the All-Mother to give her strength, knowing full well that Mythal may not give a damn as she charged her weapon and fired. The static cage would not hold him indefinitely, but it slowed the Magister down long enough for her to set off another barrage, lightning singing through the air as it mixed with Dorian's flames. Corypheus staggered, his shouts soon matched by the wailing shriek of his dragon in the distance. The air filled with the creature's agonized screams as a streak of scarlet flew into sight, striking Corypheus in the chest. He shuddered, sucking in a breath, his eyes wide with rage as he realized what had happened.

His boasts of eternity were hollow now. He was just as mortal as they were.

His lips peeled back, teeth bared as he shouted, lifting his hands to the orb above his head. "I will not go into that darkness alone. Let it end here! Let the skies boil. Let the world be rent asunder!" The Breach roiled as the Veil shuddered, the tear expanding with a violent torrent of energy. Balls of green flame fell from the sky as the heavens began to break apart, the thunderous sound of it drowning out the din of battle. Dorian cast haste and Isii could feel her heart pounding, the party surging forward with everything they had left. Lightning whipped from her staff as Cole's daggers tore into Corypheus, a flurry of bloodstained motion that he attempted to fend off but to no avail. Bull's axe slashed deep across his back, his flesh open and raw, oozing with corruption. Poisoned magic, spasming and unfocused, hurtled about his form.

"No!" he roared. "Not like this!" His eyes were glowing, scarlet and hollow embers as blighted energy raced through his form, knocking them back with all the power he could muster. Isii grunted as she skittered across the stone, the impact sending her staff flying from her grasp, her nerves screaming with the pain that shot through her core. Blood seeped beneath her leathers, armor slickened and sticking to her skin as her head spun. But she could not focus on that now. Not now. Not when she was so close.

She rolled, biting down on her lip to stifle the cry that thickened in her throat, hauling herself up. Corypheus summoned the orb down into his hands, but it would no longer obey his whims. The energy coursing through it was too much, too uncontrolled, too powerful to be tamed as the Breach continued to expand, the very world itself losing stability. He thrashed, hands grasping, a genuine look of panic contorting his features. "I have walked the halls of the Golden City! Crossed the ages!"

Isii staggered forward, her right hand clutching her stomach as the left sparked, the anchor flaring into life. She could feel the pull of the orb, the familiar pulsing vibration of its energy. It beat with the same rhythm of the mark, the same power that had fused to her body, that lived beneath her flesh. They were one and the same now. They were both vessels for Fen'Harel - a title she would have once scorned but now embraced fully. She lifted her hand and the anchor sang, calling to the orb as green light erupted across its surface. Corypheus's eyes narrowed on her and she could tell he felt it too.

The orb wanted to go where it belonged.

"Dumat!" he shouted. "Ancient one! I beseech you!" One clawed hand grasped at the orb while the other extended toward her, struggling to summon, to knock her back once more. But he was fighting against a tide he could not match, a force he could not meet. He could see his own mortality in the eyes of this small, insignificant elf who stood before him, bleeding to death. There was a sick satisfaction to be found in that. Isii stepped closer, hand outstretched as his hold on the orb buckled, rippling through the weakened Veil. "If you exist - if you ever truly existed- aid me now!"

His pleas fell on deaf ears as the artifact ripped from his fingers, striking him hard across the face as it rushed through the air to meet the curve of her palm. Ancient, unfiltered mana flooded her body along with a sense of awe she had not expected. It was as if she was finally whole, complete, the restless churning of the mark falling into a calm symbiosis with its source. She did not need to draw from it for it was a part of her, an endless eternity of magic that surrendered completely to her will. She took a slow breath as Corypheus slumped to the ground, her eyes lifting to the skies above. With an effortless gesture, a pillar of energy soared into the heavens, healing light cascading over the darkened clouds, a halo of serenity stilling the Breach. With little more than a thought, she closed the tear, stitching it together as the Veil finally ended its trembling, the first rays of sunlight breaking through the canopy.

Her eyes grew glassy, a tear threatening to fall upon her cheek. She could understand now why Corypheus considered himself a god with the orb under his control. To hold it was to touch true divinity. Something beautiful, ethereal, as if the universe itself moved within her. The fact that he'd used such a gift to cause so much harm was a perversity she could never forgive.

The orb fell dormant in her hand and that feeling of bliss faded as her senses returned to the limitations of her physical body. The pain in her stomach, the acrid scent of her blood, the heavy weight of her limbs as consciousness held by an ever-thinning thread. Isii tucked the artifact safely under her arm, slowly stepping closer to Corypheus. She lifted her hand, the anchor thrumming in her palm. "You wanted into the Fade?" she asked, his eyes glowing green as she opened a rift, enveloping the entirety of his form with the Veil he so desired to move beyond. "Have your wish."

He writhed, shouting in panicked agony as his body spasmed, fighting against it - until there was nothing. An absence where once he knelt. The Veil swallowing his essence and dissipating it into oblivion.

The construct holding the suspended ruins dissolved along with the monster who'd formed it, threads unravelling as the ground beneath them shook, plummeting back down to meet the mountainside. Isii turned, willing herself into a sprint as her companions retreated. "Everyone take cover!" she shouted, trying her best to dodge the crumbling wreckage as the temple trembled, stones tumbling from their ancient foundations. A pillar fell into her path and she stumbled, hitting the ground as the orb rolled out of her grasp. "*No!*" she shrieked, scrambling forward in an attempt to catch it, trying desperately to ignore the pain as her body protested. It was the key. The one thing that could possibly make all the suffering and the loss worthwhile. She promised Fen'Harel she would save it and she couldn't lose it now. Not after all she had been through. She could hear shouting, her name on someone's lips as she reached out. No sooner had she cradled the orb with her arm than she felt a crushing weight crash down onto her back, her vision thrown into darkness as she was buried under fallen debris. Bones snapped, crackling like kindling, pain blossoming through every nerve. Muscles strained reflexively but she was trapped, unable to pull away. Her head rung from the force of the blow, a dazed fog filling her mind. Isii struggled for breath, her ribs tightly compressed, each inhalation growing thicker and thicker as her lungs filled with fluid. She squeezed her eyes shut, curling her body as best she could around the orb. If she could only do one last thing, let it be this.

For the People.

For him.

The trembling stopped with a violent crash, the impact shuddering through the heavy stones above her. Magic soon wove among the rubble, rocks scraping and tumbling against one another. She could hear Bull straining, harsh grunting efforts as some of the pressure lifted. Their voices were muffled and distant and yet their panic was more than clear.

“Maker, no! Is she-”

“Still alive,” Cole responded, cutting Cassandra off. “Copper on the lips. Lungs ache, struggling, drowning-”

“Cole, *stop*.” Solas snapped with more venom in his voice than he would ever normally use with his friend and it made her heart ache to hear it. Solas. Her Solas. How anguished must he feel. Did he see her in that moment when the ruins collapsed in on her? She tried to imagine standing in his place, choking on the fear that she may have just watched her vhenan being crushed to death. She wanted to comfort him but couldn’t make a sound beyond a weakened groan.

Pinpricks of light danced across closed eyelids, a crackling buzz like an ever-growing swarm of insects filling her ears. Everything felt heavy. So incredibly heavy. She wasn’t aware that she’d blacked out until she choked, sputtering, coughing as she felt liquid filling her throat. “Swallow,” a voice said, barely piercing her awareness. “You have to swallow.” She was on her back, a vial pressed to her lips and she tried her best to obey, the familiar bitter flavor of elfroot mixing with the taste of blood in her mouth. She opened her eyes, her hazy vision filtering the shape of Dorian leaning over her, propping her head up as he poured the last of the health potion past her lips. Solas knelt at her side, his hands working quickly, pulling the fastenings of her armor to expose the raw and bloodied skin beneath. He needed direct contact if he had any hope of healing wounds that ran so deep.

“Solas?” she rasped, her voice thin and barely above a whisper.

“I’m right here,” he said, smoothing his hand over the torn flesh of her stomach, his brow furrowing with concentration. The stabbing pain of his touch was soon washed away by his magic, numbing her, yet even that couldn’t eliminate the way her body ached. The damage was too much, too much perhaps for even him to heal - a fear he seemed to share from the way he looked down at her.

“Halam’shivanas,” she whispered, her eyes stinging as she squeezed them shut.

“Open your eyes, vhenan.” She obeyed, but her eyelids fluttered. Darkness pulled at the edges of her vision, inky and thick and she felt as though she was being dragged downward, sinking and struggling and unable to hold her head up to the surface. Cassandra’s voice was low and distant in the background, words Isii couldn’t make out though they held the rhythm of a prayer.

“Ma ghilana mir din’an...”

“Don’t say that.” Fen’Harel’s voice was pinched, his throat tightening. “You’re not going anywhere.”

“It’s alright,” she breathed. “I saved the orb. You can make everything right again...”

“Isii-”

“I’m not scared.”

“Isii, keep your eyes open.”

“Ar lath-” Her tongue fell still, unable to finish before the slackening weight took hold. Darkness descended and all was silence as consciousness slipped from her grasp.

I promise you, this isn't the end of the story. We're getting so close, though, I can't believe it.

Thank you so much for sticking with me so far, for all of your comments and encouragements. I cannot put into words how much it means to me. We've come a really long way for a story that was originally just supposed to be a one-shot.

Translation:

Emm'asha - my woman.

Halam'shivanas - the sweet sacrifice of duty. The loss of something personal for duty's sake.

Ma ghilana mir din'an - Guide me into death. The same plea Wisdom made to Solas before she died. Ouch.



## Chapter 24

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At first, there was only silence.

Not the silence of a still night, where the wind and the distant chirping of insects hummed just outside of her awareness.

Nor the silence of a calm morning, when the quiet songs of birds greeting the daylight were so familiar to her ears that she did not consciously hear them without truly stopping to listen.

This silence was a void - gaping and all-consuming.

Isii's eyes opened slowly, her brows furrowing as her vision cleared. Elvhen archways loomed overhead, a canopy of gold-kissed stone stretching far into the distance above her, more delicate and complex than she had ever seen. Light coursed along their curvature, deep orange hues cutting through the stark shadows, yet there was no flicker in those flames. No spark or dance. No crackling sound.

Just utter, eerie stillness. Like the world was frozen in place. Like someone had captured a single glimpse within a passing memory and preserved it in perfect detail. A facade. An imitation of reality.

She pushed herself to her feet cautiously. Every scrape of her boots on the smooth stone floor seemed unnaturally loud as she slowly turned, letting her eyes scan the room. She was in the center of a wide circle, surrounded on all sides by an assortment of large, ornate thrones, each distinctly different in their designs and yet each held an air of authority. Grandeur. Nine in all - seven of which sat below the dais of the other two. A twisting nest of white birch branches. A hard stone surface carved with an assortment of animals and elves. Two seats identical, save for their color - a gleaming silver matched with deep, inky greens, the light casting off of it creating the illusion of stars. Her eyes settled on the pale marble of one throne, elegant curves offset by the jagged teeth carved into the high back, like open jaws waiting to snap down at a moment's notice.

Nine thrones for the nine Elvhen gods.

All of them empty.

Something was wrong. She could feel it clawing at her skin, instincts flaring against the unnatural aura of this place, where neither scent nor sound nor movement seemed to dwell. She did not know where she was or how she had gotten there, scanning her mind to try and piece together memories.

Corypheus. The battle. The orb. Solas's face. The pain in his eyes. The words she desperately wanted to say dying on her lips before she was swept away by nothingness.

Except there was no pain now. Her hand smoothed over her stomach, her body clothed in her everyday attire for Skyhold - not the torn and bloodied armor of war. Her injuries were gone. Her gut was no longer shredded and leaking, her bones no longer broken. Even the most powerful healing magic wouldn't leave her so restored. Not this quickly. It wasn't possible.

A heavy dread churned in her gut, her chest tight as a pang of fear shot through her. Fear at what this place might be, that felt so unreal and void of life. There was no oaken staff or cedar branch -

no ravens of Fear and Deceit. This didn't look at all like what her people had described when they spoke of what awaited the faithful after their final breath.

But the Dalish had been wrong before.

"I must say you have surprised me, Inquisitor."

The voice made Isii jump, turning quickly in search of its source. Atop the massive throne of emerald covered in delicately carved scales sat a barefaced elven woman, eyeing her intently. "There are very few who can claim such a feat," she added, her lips curling into a tight smile.

The woman sat with ease against the throne as if it was crafted for her form alone. Her age was difficult to discern - youthful and yet certainly not young, her golden eyes conveying a wisdom and scrutiny that went beyond the faint wrinkles that lined them. Regal and straight-backed, her chin was held high as long ringlets of blonde hair cascaded over sun-kissed skin, woven with strips of burgundy ribbon. A crown sat atop her head, the hair above the ring of dark tungsten bound with those same purpled crimson strips that pulled it into elegant swathes, curving and tapering behind her. Fine robes of purple and maroon were offset by a high collar made of small metallic scales, their luster dripping down her form like a second skin. She was beauty and grace embodied - but there was something cold and hard within her stare, lingering just beneath the surface.

Her head tilted, her gaze scanning Isii with scrutiny as she continued. "What will be, what may be... It is often difficult to tell one from the other when you see all of the twisting paths as I do. And yet you have shaped one I did not foresee." Her eyes narrowed, a mixture of delight and intrigue painting the slope of her mouth. " *Very* interesting. Now the sacrifice is unnecessary. A life for the shattered remains of what his hands should have grasped. And I suppose I have you to thank for it."

Isii stared at her, her brow pulling tighter as she frowned. "Who are-

"I would hope the Dread Wolf's chosen companion is more clever than that," the woman interrupted, her fingers toying idly with a goblet that sat beside her. "I can move through the Fade just as easily as he. When I am here, I am not bound to appear in the flesh I bear in waking." She chuckled, her tone laced with both mirth and the unspoken menace of unquestionable power.

"Mythal," Isii whispered, her voice hushed as understanding washed over her features.

The goddess smiled approvingly, gesturing for her to move closer. "I do not believe we were ever formally introduced, Inquisitor. As amusing as my daughter's theatrics may be, she did neglect to give me your name."

"Isii," she answered warily as she approached the dais, somehow suspecting Mythal already knew. Solas had said as much himself - there is very little that stays hidden from her for long.

Mythal echoed the sound, her brows lifting slightly. "Such a small name for a woman who has achieved so much. Though your title will likely live on long after such things are forgotten. There are but a few lips left to whisper what I was once called in ages past."

Isii's mouth went dry. "You said this is the Fade," she murmured, afraid to receive an answer to the question that now pressed past her tongue. "Am I dreaming? Or am I..." The word halted, trapped and unwilling to budge as she swallowed hard. "Am I-

"Dead?" Mythal offered dismissively, a single brow arching. She plucked her goblet from the arm of her throne, bringing it to her lips. "That would be an unfortunate end to your tale, wouldn't it?"

An answer that was not an answer as she took a slow sip. “The Herald silenced to save the world she fought so very hard to keep. Fen’Harel’s champion using her last breaths to recover what he could not. Considering its purpose...” She paused to chuckle. “It does sound rather poetic.”

Rage bubbled at her lack of concern. Grief lingered at the back of Isii’s mind, grief over what she had lost, those she had left behind, the goodbyes she hadn’t said and she was struggling to hold those feelings at bay until she knew whether or not it was true. If she gave into it, if she acknowledged it fully, she knew she would drown in the loss. Picturing her friends, her companions, those who had fought at her side, those who had grown to love her and embrace her as one of their own. Imagining Deshanna receiving word - she hadn’t even seen her Keeper since before the Conclave. The woman who had tried her best to raise her, to fill the void her parents left, losing her First and her daughter in one fell swoop - and Fen’harel, watching his lover die, knowing he had forced her into this fate the moment his magic burned its way into her skin...

Isii’s fists tightened at her sides. How *dare* Mythal find amusement in this?

*Pray my mother is not leading us both astray, Inquisitor. She is not above doing so for her own amusement.*

Morrigan’s words echoed through her consciousness as she shoved her anger down, trying not to let it register on her face. Morrigan had suspected that Mythal’s actions that day were a test. Perhaps this was one as well.

“Why am I here?”

“Because I wished to speak alone with the mortal to whom he has given so much of his trust.” There was an edge to her tone, something hard and unforgiving despite the passivity of her features. “The mortal who has changed the course of this tale. You were supposed to remain blind until the time was right - or at least, until he could bear the secret no longer. But now, that day will never come. He will not watch you crawl as the anchor burns you away, will not reveal truths in the faint hope that you will somehow manage to stay his hand. His resolve was set then. For what he must do. For what he had already done to achieve his ends - a crime for which an eternity of torment is the only fitting punishment. Or so he said himself.” Isii frowned, confused as Mythal’s chin lifted. “Tell me, how did you learn of his identity? Were you clever enough to discover it on your own or was it some heartfelt confession in a moment of weakness?”

The image of that day sprang fresh into her mind - the way her heart stopped as she saw Solas transform, as she watched the man she loved melt into the adversary she was sworn to stand against as a First and future Keeper.

“I saw his true nature for myself,” she said cautiously. “He used his power to protect me. To save me when I was powerless to fight back.”

Mythal’s face gave away nothing as she stared back at her. “I suppose it only makes sense that he would do whatever it took to keep his only weapon against Corypheus alive.”

The word stung and she could not help the barest flinch from crossing over her features. *Weapon*. His weapon. The anchor was the only tool they had to stop the Magister. Solas had known that from the very beginning. He had been by her side since even before she regained consciousness after the Conclave, volunteering to keep the mark from killing her. It was his guidance that helped her hone her newfound ability, to use it more effectively to close the rifts.

But that wasn’t all she was to him. She wasn’t a blade for him to wield. That wasn’t the reason he’d saved her that day, or the countless times before and after it.

At least, not the *only* reason.

Mythal's gaze held firm. "And what does he need that weapon for, now that he has the orb?"

"I am not a weapon," Isii said firmly. "I am his ally."

"More than that."

"Yes," Isii said, trying to resist the urge to hiss the word defensively. "Much more than that."

Mythal studied her, her head tilting slightly. "You love him."

"I do."

"And you believe he feels the same, do you?" she asked, her brows lifting. "You know how easily he can make you see only what you wish to see. And yet you do not doubt his devotion?"

Isii's eyes narrowed. She'd felt his love for her, witnessed it firsthand from his mind, saw it in his gaze, heard it behind each word. Was Mythal trying to make her doubt that? Did she think it truly unfathomable that he would ever love someone like her? Or was she simply toying with her for some reason she could not comprehend?

"Ele galinesan vhenanen," she said firmly. *We are each other's hearts.*

Isii half-expected Mythal to mock her or taunt her. Instead there was only pity in the goddess's gaze as she let out a slow breath. "You know of his plans?" she continued, her voice hushed. "What he intends to do with the orb?"

"He's going to tear down the Veil."

Mythal's lips tightened ever-so-slightly. "Your actions have already shown me that you would die for him. I wonder though, if you are willing to pay a higher price to help him now."

Isii frowned. "What price could I possibly pay that is higher than my own death?"

The shift was faint, barely there, but Isii could see sadness in the goddess's golden eyes. That same quiet grief that so often lingered in Solas's gaze, that look that had puzzled her for months before she knew the truth about his past. "The power to make change is as much of a burden as it is a gift," she said gravely. "But a new age *will* come." Her hold tightened against the goblet in her hand, her once loosened grasp now paling the tips of her fingers. "It *must*."

Isii felt something in the air shift, energy brushing against her. Searching. Inspecting. She thought for a moment it was Mythal's doing until she felt the familiar vibration, so similar to the anchor and yet older, deeper, an ancient well of magic whose source she'd felt hundreds of times before.

*Solas .*

Her eyes searched the hall, half-expecting to see him, but there was nothing behind her save for the empty chamber. There was a tug, that same energy trying to draw her away, like a hand reaching out from the darkness to grasp her own and pull her out. She felt desperation in its hold - fear and pain and hope as it tightened. She wanted to hold onto it, every instinct screaming desperately to somehow show him that she was there.

Mythal rose from her throne, seemingly aware and yet unsurprised as she slowly descended from the dais. "That took longer than I would have expected," she murmured. "He must be out of

practice.” She stepped closer as that invisible hold strengthened, calling to her.

*Come back to me, vhenan. Come back to me.*

Mythal’s hand brushed against Isii’s cheek, settling beneath her chin- a touch that was strangely maternal from a woman who had struck such fear in her before. “You have done well, child,” she murmured softly, offering a saddened smile. “Fate has dealt an unkind hand to you both. Enjoy your reward while you can.”

The chamber melted into shadow as Isii was drawn away, jerked backward, a sensation so sudden it felt as though she was knocked off of her feet. A shock of pain tore through her, her limbs heavy and aching as her eyes snapped open with a gasp, her ribs throbbing against her expanding lungs. She blinked, trying to get her bearings after the unexpected transition. She was in her quarters, lying on her bed, a cool evening breeze chilling the warmth radiating from her fireplace. Shadows flickered against the flame’s light, dancing across Fen’Harel’s form where he lay slumped on her couch, his head propped on his arm as if he’d simply dozed off. A tray of food sat on the floor beside him, barely touched among the scattered array of herbs, potions and bandages.

His chest rose in a quick, deep breath as his eyes opened, widening as they fixed on her.

“Isii...”

His lips hung open, his relief barely registering before he was on his feet, staggering to her bedside. His mouth met hers in a panicked rush, his hands clutching the sides of her face as she whimpered, her muscles stinging in protest. Solas’s magic was already soothing the ache by the time he whispered an apology against her lips, his fingers noticeably trembling as he pressed his brow to hers.

“Solas-”

“I searched for you,” he said, his eyes squeezed shut. “When I could not sense you in the Fade, I feared-” His throat visibly tightened, choking off his words. Isii slid her hand against the nape of his neck, squeezing gently. She kissed his lips, his jaw, his cheek, repeating soft reassurances.

She was alive. Her encounter in the Fade had only been a dream, not her spirit moving into the Beyond as she had feared. If she had died, she knew there was no coming back - not even with Mythal’s or the Dread Wolf’s intervention. Isii drew him closer and it wasn’t until he was laying beside her, curled against her form that he let out a shuddering sigh, his tension slowly unwinding. Fen’Harel was gentle, his touch more cautious now as he loosely wrapped his arm around her, careful to avoid the bandages on her stomach.

“How long have I been asleep?”

“Three days,” he whispered, wetting his lips. “Three days of healing you. Keeping you comfortable. Not knowing if you would wake...” He let out a ragged breath and she tightened her hold on him.

“It’s alright, Solas.”

“I don’t know what I would have done-”

“It’s over now,” she murmured, her eyes closing. “It’s over.”

Her brow furrowed in disbelief as his thumb stroked her side, his head tucking into the crook of her neck. *Three days.* It felt as though she’d only been conscious in the Fade for a few moments.

She tried to remember the details of the dream, pushing through the haze of waking to hold onto the fragments of her conversation with the All-Mother. What had been the purpose? What was the goddess trying to learn in seeking her out? And there was something else, some lingering uncertainty in the few pieces she could remember.

*He will not watch you crawl as the anchor burns you away, will not reveal truths in the faint hope that you will somehow manage to stay his hand.*

Stay his hand from what? Didn't he want the Veil to come down? Wasn't that the goal he'd been trying to achieve this whole time? It was going to heal the world, to bring magic back to its natural state, to allow her People to be as they once were. That's what he'd told her, wasn't it? Or was it another half-truth, like all the lies of omission he'd made before?

The Dread Wolf's lips were on her throat, soft breaths easing her uncertainty as he laced his fingers gently with her own. "You did it," he whispered, squeezing her hand in his. "You survived."

"And saved the orb."

His hold tightened slightly as he sighed. "If it had been destroyed, there would have been ways around it," he said grimly, his face buried in her hair as his nose trailed against her shoulder. "A fate I would not have wanted to face, but..." He paused, the weight of whatever laid beyond those words darkening his gaze before he kissed her again, brushing loose ivory strands from her cheek. "I gave my orb to Corypheus. I would not have been able to forgive myself if he had used my power to kill you." Cool blue eyes studied her face as his features softened. "You have been a gift to me, far greater than anything I deserve, vhenan. There is no way I could possibly repay you for what you've given me."

Isii smiled sadly before tilting her chin, drawing him down to her lips once more.

She trusted him. He had earned that trust. If Mythal was trying to test her resolve, she would not falter. She knew she was exactly where she belonged. Here, by his side, helping him however she could.

It was the path she chose and she wasn't going to stray from it.

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"Ugh, I should have never hired new caterers so late."

"Leave it be, Josie," Leliana hummed, her mouth hovering over the lip of her drink. "Everything is fine."

"It is not!" Josephine protested with a huff, scrubbing her fingertips over her brow. "Do you like the drinks? I'm not sure about them."

"If I told you the pork was a little dry, would you burst into flame?" Dorian asked, his moustache curling over a smirk. Josephine didn't seem to appreciate the humor, her face paling as she clutched her tablet.

"You're joking, right?" she asked with a hint of panic. "*Please* tell me you're joking."

"He's just teasing," Isii reassured her as she lingered by the serving table, slowly picking over the generous assortment of food her ambassador had arranged for the evening. Skyhold was filled with merriment, their celebration spilling out of the main hall and into the courtyard beyond - a grand celebration of the Inquisition's triumph.

“What a disaster,” Josephine continued with a sigh, glancing over the list held tightly in her hand. “The sommelier was late, the invitations to our guests barely went out at all...”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t have defeated Corypheus,” Isii said dryly, glancing over to Dorian. “It sounds like it would have saved us a lot of trouble in terms of party planning.”

“Well we certainly couldn’t have prepared ahead of time,” he replied coolly. “It would have been awfully embarrassing to send out invitations celebrating your victory only to have you lose.”

Josephine let out a small laugh, shaking her head. “Believe me, it was wonderful to prepare for a small banquet instead of the end of the world.”

“All this pomp and ceremony?” Blackwall muttered, shrugging. “Can’t top making that bastard Corypheus burn. I only wish I’d been there to see it firsthand.” He hesitated a moment, clearing his throat. “Not that we don’t appreciate your efforts, Lady Montilyet. It seems you could move a mountain in a week if you wanted it to happen.”

The advisor blushed, biting back a shy grin as her fingers brushed over the small, white flower pinned to her lapel - a gesture Blackwall seemed to take special note of, his smile widening. “I do what I can,” she replied sweetly.

Leliana’s eyes narrowed and Blackwall’s gaze shifted awkwardly, settling on Isii as he gave a nod. “So now that you’ve saved the world, what’s next? Hoping to put it all back together?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes,” Isii answered, briefly scanning the room. Still no sign of Solas. She half-expected him to be in her quarters, refusing to let the orb out of his sight. They’d both agreed it was the most secure location for the time being, though he was hesitant to leave it unguarded. “That is the idea.”

“If anyone can do it, you can,” Blackwall replied, tipping his glass.

“You really should be mingling, Inquisitor,” Josephine chided softly. “Many of our guests have travelled a long way for a chance to offer their congratulations.”

“I just need a little room to breathe,” Isii said. “Honestly I find parading around and playing host to visiting nobles exhausting. I don’t know how you can stand it.”

“Years of practice, I assure you,” she said before tilting her head. “Are you feeling well? Perhaps I should have allowed more time for your recovery-”

“I’m fine, Josie, really,” Isii said, offering a weak smile. “Clean bill of health. It’s just playing politics that’s draining.”

“They all wish to bask in the glory of your victory, Inquisitor,” Leliana replied. “Most of them are probably hoping some of it will rub off on them. Everyone knows Empress Celene owes you her life and her throne. A thousand problems remain and your opinion will be sought on each one - whether you wish to give it or not.”

She knew the words were supposed to be encouraging, but Isii couldn’t help the weight that hung uncomfortably on her shoulders at the thought. She’d spent most of this war in the field, battling monsters and closing rifts. Diplomacy was a game she only played when she had to, when she could not push the responsibility off onto her ambassador. She’d never really given much thought to what would happen once Corypheus was defeated, but she could see a fairly clear picture of it now- years filled with meetings and consultations, playing the part of a dignitary, a ruler with no kingdom of her own.

The thought of it made her stomach turn but she covered it with a polite, wordless smile.

“Do you know what everyone is talking about tonight, from commoners to kings?” Josephine’s face brightened as she scooped up a glass from the table. “*Us*. Thedas is discussing the success of the Inquisition.”

“Are you descending into open boasting, Lady Montilyet?” Dorian asked with feigned shock.

“I can scarcely think of a better time,” she replied. Her eyes lowered, her fingers tracing over the rim of her drink as her voice quieted. “Truly we will never forget those we lost, but for tonight...” She lifted her gaze, raising her glass high. “To victory.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Blackwall said with a grin as the circle of friends joined in the toast.

Her brief moment of celebration seemed to vanish as Josephine’s eyes flicked over to the far corner of the room, her brow furrowing as she swallowed. She muttered a quiet curse as she excused herself, rushing over to a group of confused-looking servants carrying trays of food seemingly without destination.

“I’ll make sure she doesn’t take anyone’s head off,” Blackwall murmured, bowing his head slightly before following the ambassador. Leliana’s eyes studied him cautiously before returning to Isii, watching as she filled her plate with a variety of petit fours.

“Josephine sent all the way to the capital for those,” she said warmly. “She’s been craving the cakes from Madame Lucienne’s shop for months. This celebration gave her the perfect excuse.” Her lips pursed slightly as Isii picked up a small black cake covered in a light dusting of gold, curiously bringing it to her nose. “I... would not eat that if I were you.” Isii frowned. “Deep mushroom and anise.” The Inquisitor’s expression soured, already lowering the cake back to the serving tray as she continued. “I believe they call it The Exquisite Misery. An awful combination, but it’s quite popular in Val Royeaux.”

“That sounds utterly disgusting.”

“Oh, it is.” Leliana took a sip of her wine, sighing. “Orlais. Why did we save her again?”

“Good question,” Isii muttered, making a silent note to warn Solas about the bizarre treat. A playful smile pulled at her lips at the thought of his face screwing up in disgust if he had to suffer through making the discovery on his own. Perhaps she’d amuse herself with that later.

If he ever showed up to the party, that is.

“I’ll make the rounds - try to buy you a little more time for refreshments,” Leliana said, tilting her glass as she drew away. “To you, Inquisitor. For all you’ve done.” Isii bowed her head respectfully.

“I’m certain the constant toasts to your health and well-being are losing their charm,” Dorian muttered once they were alone. “Is all the admiration not sitting well with you?”

“I appreciate the sentiment, at least,” Isii admitted. “Though I do wish some of these nobles would stop looking at me like I’m some sort of miracle. I was a bit more comfortable with them all ignoring me on account of my ears.”

He hummed thoughtfully around a sip of wine. “I was passing through the hall this morning and a serving girl saw me and squealed. Actually squealed. Dropped her laundry and everything. Such a mess.” Isii snorted as he continued. “She was completely breathless. *You were at the battle with the Evil One, weren’t you?*” He mimicked in a high, reedy voice, his hand dramatically clutching his



chest. “I didn’t even get a chance to answer. She hugged me.” His tone flattened, unamused. “*Hugged me,*” he stressed, lifting an accusatory finger. “This is your influence.”

Isii laughed, smiling. “I guess that’s what happens when you’re a hero.”

“Is that so?” he asked, his brows lifting. “Must be why it’s so unfamiliar.”

“Admit it,” she purred, “you’re loving this.”

“I don’t trust camaraderie,” he said dismissively with a wave of his hand. “All these people smiling, buying me drinks... it’s unnatural. Mind you, I can’t say I hate the notion of being *The Good Tevinter*,” he added with a shrug. “*I suppose you can’t all be evil bastards.* The blacksmith said that and he *spat* when we first met.” He laughed into another sip. “I hope my father hears. He will shit his smallclothes from shock, I swear.”

“I’m happy you’re still here, despite the less than warm welcome.”

“I fully expected to die,” he said blithely. “It would have been thematically appropriate. But then you had to go and steal my thunder by pulling that stunt on your own. It would have seemed repetitive, then.”

“You still have a chance, you know. I did survive, after all.”

“You barely escaped becoming a martyr,” he said wistfully. “Oh the songs they would have composed in your honor-”

“There will still be songs.”

“Yes, but they won’t have the same gravitas, now will they? The hero always dies in all the best stories. Anything else just sounds so implausible.”

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” Isii said. “I’m sure Varric’s book sales will suffer because of it.”

“Oh well,” he said, gesturing with his glass. “A missed opportunity. We’ll just have to be satisfied with both of us being alive.” His smile softened as he looked down into his drink, swirling the liquid idly. “I’ve put a lot of thought into this. I’ve decided I will go back to Tevinter, eventually. Try to make it better and all that nonsense. But I... think I may stay for a while yet. I’m rather enjoying the South.” His eyes lifted, the corner of his mouth twitching. “Tevinter lacks the presence of my best and only friend. Would be a shame to leave so soon.”

Isii smiled broadly, her eyes growing somewhat glassy. If someone had told her a year ago that a Tevinter mage would become one of her closest companions, she would have called them mad. But Dorian was truly dear to her, one of the best men she knew, and knowing how resistant he was toward expressing attachment made the sentiment mean that much more. She leaned forward, drawing him into a tight hug. He stiffened awkwardly before letting out a laugh, his arms settling around her as she pressed her face into his chest.

“Come now, don’t encourage sentimentality,” he chided. “It’s a horrible habit I am trying to break myself of.” Despite his objections, he didn’t loosen his hold, letting out a slow breath as he lowered his lips to her ear. “All the same,” he whispered. “I’m glad you’re still here. Even if it would have made for a better story.”

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Another hour of toasts and cheers. Of teary-eyed confessions. Of being cornered by nobles who

had never given her the time of day before in order to declare how they'd always had unwavering confidence in her abilities. Isii's face ached from forced smiles as she sifted through the crowd, seeking a brief escape. Solas still was nowhere to be found and she was growing envious that his absence went mostly unnoticed while all eyes seemed fixed on her every movement. She settled instead for the quiet corner where Cullen and Cassandra conversed, muttering over her glass as she approached.

"Please pretend we're having a very serious discussion right now," Isii said wearily. "Something that gives off an air of *do not interrupt*."

"And how am I supposed to accomplish that, exactly?" Cullen asked.

"Just look at me and pretend you're staring at the War Table," she hummed, her cheeks warming as she pressed back another desperately-needed gulp of wine. "Once they see that crease in your brow, they'll know I'm saying something very profound and hopefully keep their noses out of it."

He laughed, shaking his head. "That bad, is it?"

"It's not my idea of a party, I'll put it that way," she said, sighing. "I'd much rather be celebrating our success with a long night in the tavern."

"I'll admit, that does sound fairly tempting right now."

"I can't believe it's over," Cassandra said. "It seemed an insurmountable task. Defy the Chantry. Build the Inquisition from nothing. Defeat a creature that would be a god... and yet here we are."

Cullen leaned his shoulder against the wall, his arms crossing as he smiled at Isii. "Am I imagining it, or do we actually have a moment to breathe? It feels jarring after the year we've had." There was a visible weight lifted from his expression, an ease she was not used to seeing that made it impossible not to smile in return. "You should hear the stories they're telling in the barracks. The pride in their voices. Some of the soldiers have requested to return home, but many would follow us still. You are proof that the Inquisition has made a difference. That we will continue to do so."

"I couldn't have done it with you, Commander," she said, resting her hand on his arm. "Our soldiers put their trust in you. I never would have gotten them to follow me without your help. I can't tell you how thankful I am--"

"I should be thanking you," he said, cutting her off. His gaze lowered as he rubbed the back of his neck. "You gave me a chance to... to prove myself," he said quietly. "In your place, I'm not sure I would have done the same."

"Well then it's a good thing I'm the one in charge," Isii teased.

His expression warmed as his eyes met hers. "I suppose it is."

"It's odd, isn't it?" Cassandra mused. "I was almost certain the Maker was playing some cosmic joke on me, on us all. Yet you were exactly what we needed, Isii." She stared into her drink, frowning. "I think back on how we first met... You were my prisoner, someone who I accused of such horrific crimes - and yet now here you stand. The Inquisitor, a symbol of hope and of change to so many. And someone I can call a friend." Her smile was somewhat vulnerable as she shook her head. "How did that happen, I wonder?"

"My incredible charm and wit?" Isii offered, grinning.

"Something like that," Cassandra said flatly as Cullen chuckled. "In either case, I am pleased it all

turned out this way. It has been an honor serving you.”

A familiar laugh drew Isii’s eyes away, glancing down the hall until she found the source - Solas was smiling, wine glass in hand as he stood with Cole toward the far end of the room. The spirit grinned broadly, seemingly pleased by the approval of his friend’s laughter and Isii couldn’t help but smile at the sight.

“We should probably let you mingle,” Cullen said, following her gaze before clearing his throat. “I’m sure there are others who desire your attention.”

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“They’re all happy,” Cole said, looking about the room. “There’s still fear, but she helped them all. She healed what was hurt.”

“Indeed she did,” Solas said warmly.

“Pride swells at the thought of her-”

“That’s... not precisely how I would phrase it, Cole,” Solas murmured into his glass, trying to stifle a laugh. He understood what the spirit meant but was silently thankful Varric was not within hearing range. Knowing him, he undoubtedly would save that for his retelling of their affairs. “But you are correct. I am very proud of her accomplishments.”

Cole studied the faces in the hall once more, eyes darting between them as his fingertips twitched. “It haunts them. They know it will for years to come. But they don’t want to forget what happened, even if it gives them nightmares. It would hurt less, but it matters to them.”

“Fear reminds the people of why they fought,” Solas said calmly. “If they forgot the purpose behind them, then their sacrifices, their losses, would lose meaning. Their victory would be a hollow one, lacking the full weight of its significance. There is value in that pain, however difficult it is to bear.”

Cole considered for a moment before nodding. “It’s part of being people. I know that now. I don’t understand, but they need it. It’s why you’ve never forgotten, even though it would make you happier.”

Solas dropped his gaze, quieted as Cole peered at him. “It hurts more now that you have the orb,” the spirit said softly. Fen’Harel paused, his eyes still set on the stone floor. He could not blame Cole for sensing his distress, no matter how uncomfortable it was to hear it put into words. Though his mind was often harder for the spirit to see, it came as little surprise that the feeling bled off of him quite clearly now.

“It does,” he admitted.

“The chase made it easier because the pieces you needed were missing. Purpose refocused, but only temporarily. You could let yourself see these people for what they are without thinking about what comes next. It changes everything and now there’s doubt. Hard and heavy and choking.”

Solas’s eyes darted up quickly, suddenly aware of Isii’s approach as Cole continued. “You don’t want to leave-”

“That’s enough, Cole,” he said firmly, trying to hide the mild panic in his features, forcing them into a content smile to match her own. Isii closed the distance quickly, pressing a kiss onto his cheek in greeting and he tried to use her warmth to unwind the knot in his chest.

“I’ve been looking for you,” she hummed, grinning as her head tilted, a perfectly coiled curl slipping off of her shoulder. She was wearing makeup - a sight he was unaccustomed to, yet it was subtle enough to merely enhance the features of her face. Josephine had clearly made certain to cater Isii’s appearance to the event, making her look every bit as polished as their guests expected for a woman of her status. Her normal court attire was set aside in favor of a dress - far less ostentatious than the one she was forced to wear to the Winter Palace, yet no less intricate. Instead of a corset and ridiculously oversized tulle skirt, her silhouette was far simpler, swathed in deep green velvet with delicate gold stitching.

Obviously the ambassador had planned ahead for this eventuality, commissioning the garment in the hopes that Isii would live to wear it.

“Where were you?” she asked, her hand settling on his arm.

“I had other matters to attend to,” he answered vaguely, drawing her hand to his lips. “Though I certainly would not wish to miss the opportunity to tell you how stunning you look this evening.”

“Hmm. You think flattery will help after abandoning me to the wolves?” she asked, her eyes narrowing despite her amused tone.

“The wolves?” he echoed, his brow lifting.

“A figure of speech, of course.”

“Of course.”

“So what was so important that you had to skip out on the festivities?”

He should have known she would press for an answer. She’d become less willing to accept ill-defined explanations from him. An understandable consequence, considering all they had been through. “I had to pay a brief visit to Halamshiral,” he said.

“Halamshiral?” she repeated, surprised. “But I saw you just this morning. How did you-”

“Lady Morrigan has yet to remove her mirror from Skyhold, despite her preparations to take her leave. It was simple enough to travel there and back within a matter of moments. There was... a matter I had to sort out personally concerning the remaining eluvians. But it is nothing to concern yourself with, whenan,” he assured her calmly. “It has all been taken care of.”

She studied him for a moment before nodding, understanding. It was preparation for the future - for a plan she still did not know the full shape of, no matter how she’d pressed him in the past week for details. But this was neither the time nor place for such discussions, so she accepted his admission without further questioning.

Instead she politely turned her attention to the spirit at his side. “And how are you, Cole? Suffering through the party rather than slipping into the Fade?”

Cole grinned. “I think I could return to the Fade if I tried. I’m light enough to slip through.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“But I’d like to stay and help for a while, if that’s alright,” Cole added. “I can still help people here.”

“Of course,” Isii said. “I’d hate to see you leave us so soon. You’re always welcome here, Cole. As

my friend.”

“Friend,” he repeated, beaming. “Like Rhys, but you know what I am and aren’t afraid. Not like you used to be. *Yes*,” he said, his smile wide and toothy and yet pure in its joy. “*Thank you.*”

His eyes drifted quickly away and with a breath he was gone, rematerializing in another part of the hall, no doubt whispering words to lessen the hurt of the masked Orlesian who stared at him, puzzled by his sudden appearance.

“That was very kind of you,” Solas murmured.

“I was only telling him the truth.”

“And it matters more because he knows it is true,” he said. “There are very few who would embrace him, knowing what he is.”

“I seem to be making a habit of it, Dread Wolf,” she whispered, tilting her chin toward his, her hand tightening around his own. “So far it’s seems to pay off to have an open mind.” Her eyes studied his face, so warm and so loving. It would be easy to lose himself in those green depths, to ignore all else in favor of her. The thought was as comforting as it was terrifying. “I never could have done this without you.”

“Your doubts are misplaced,” he said, shaking his head. “Everything you accomplished, you earned.”

“We both know that’s not quite true.” She smiled, her eyes drifting down to his lips. “Neither one of us can take all the credit, Solas. I’d like to think we work better together than alone.”

*Together.* She believed they would take these next steps together, as equals. This was his responsibility, his mistake that he had to set right, and yet -

She leaned in closer as his eyes moved cautiously to take in the room around them. “Others can see-”

“I’m well past the point of caring, Solas,” Isii hummed, her fingers trailing along the front of his tunic. “All of these people are here because I saved the world. If they’re going to judge me for who I kiss, they can honestly all piss off.”

He laughed, his brow resting against hers. “A very diplomatic view, Inquisitor.”

“I’d say I’ve more than earned it.” Her kiss was sweet, the faint taste of sugar on her tongue as it teasingly brushed against his own, her soft breath of approval making him want nothing more than to draw her closer, to deepen the embrace. It was strange, the effect she had on him, how easily her affection could wipe away the sadness that lingered behind each thought. How something so simple could lessen the weight of the path that lay ahead for him now.

He knew he should go, he should proceed, he should pursue, but he could wait.

She made him want to wait.

He had always planned on disappearing when the time came. Once Corypheus was dead and the orb was back in his possession. But she truly believed in his cause. She wanted to help him. It wasn’t something he had ever allowed himself to believe, but - maybe. Maybe things could be different.

Maybe he didn't have to be alone.

He resisted the urge to press for more, letting her draw her lips back. "I think it's time I retired for the evening. I'm rather done with this party," she hummed, a coy smile coloring her expression. She leaned in once more, kissing his cheek, her lips hovering by his ear. "Besides, I could think of much better ways to celebrate our victory," she purred, her teeth scraping slowly his earlobe. He let out a low, hungry sigh as she giggled. "What do you say, Dread Wolf?" she whispered, nuzzling his throat. "Care to join me?"

"Are you certain?" he asked. Her intentions were clear, but he'd been careful not to pursue her intimately while she recovered from her injuries.

"I feel fine, Solas," she assured him, a soft moan in her throat as she continued. "I'd feel a lot better if you'd take me to my quarters right now."

He answered by tightening his grip on her hand, the corner of his mouth twitching as he backed away toward her door, her breathy laughter following in his wake.

## Chapter End Notes

As you can tell, we're getting dangerously close to Trespasser territory - so don't be surprised if some details from that DLC start bleeding into the text going forward. Granted, given that this AU has taken some fairly broad steps away from the canon, I wouldn't say that it will outright spoil Trespasser, but there are some significant details about Solas's plans that will come to light.

*(Also, I've made note on this on tumblr and on my latest update for Bread Wolf, but I'll repeat it here - I'm currently going through a very rough time with my family. Near-daily trips to the hospital and the stress of having my father in ill-health have made it difficult to stick to my regular updating schedule, hence this chapter being late. I'm not abandoning any projects, but don't be surprised if my ability to produce new content is a bit slower for a while.)*

## Chapter 25

### Chapter Notes

The beginning of this chapter is NSFW. Also - some Trespasser spoilers ahead.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Their bodies stilled, trembling through the aftershocks of climax as Isii's fists finally loosened from around the bed sheets. Solas slumped forward behind her, his brow resting against her back, panting over sweat-slicked skin as they both struggled to catch their breath.

"You are aware," he murmured between inhalations, "that half of Skyhold is going to know I am Fen'Harel if you keep screaming it like that."

"Oh shut up," she giggled breathlessly. "You like it."

"I do," he hummed, kissing the nape of her neck, his hands grasping her hips as he reluctantly pulled his body from hers. She crawled toward her pillows before collapsing, sighing deeply as she twisted the thin sheet over her body. As warm as she was now, she knew the night air would soon chill the sweat on her skin. Her hand went to her forehead, pushing back soaked locks.

"That was..."

"It certainly sounded like you enjoyed yourself," he said warmly as he slipped beneath the sheet, drawing her body against his own. She hummed a lazy affirmation as her eyes closed.

"I thought maybe that position would be a favorite of yours. Me, on all fours..."

"Is that a tasteless joke on account of my name?" he teased, his teeth gently scraping her shoulder.

"Would you expect anything less?" she asked, laughing as he turned her head, his lips slowly caressing her own. The Dread Wolf's fingertips slid idly along her thighs, magic stirring beneath her skin as the fatigue in her muscles ebbed away, the raw ache between her legs lessening, leaving her feeling renewed, refreshed, as if he hadn't been spending the last few hours wringing every ounce of pleasure he could from her body. This was not the first time he'd used that trick tonight - nor, she suspected, the last.

She felt full from the swell of his magic, saturated in a way that was difficult to explain, as though every inch of her was humming with the familiar signature of his mana. He'd given her more tonight than he'd ever had before, energy slipping through each brush of his lips, his fingers tracing sigils on her skin. She wondered if this was how sex used to be when magic flowed freely through all things, when immortality offered the luxury of time. Leisurely and cyclical, slow kisses stirring into passion only to begin again once they were through, magic acting as just one more tool for providing satisfaction. She could certainly see the appeal. It left a lingering bond, a feeling of attachment that was as soothing as it was exciting. He was inside of her, a part of her, even when their bodies were no longer joined.

Solas's lips curled into a lazy grin as her eyes fluttered open once more, his hand making slow circles along her stomach.

“So what happens now?”

“That depends,” he countered with a smirk before peppering kisses along her throat. “Do you have any particular requests?”

She laughed, nudging him away as she rolled over to face him fully. “No, not that. I mean with us. Where we go from here. Now that Corypheus is...”

“Ah.” He paused, his brow furrowing as his eyes shifted away from her. His lips parted again as if to speak, halting before he smiled, shaking his head. “Let's not think on that just yet.”

“Solas-”

“*Later*, vhenan,” he soothed her, tracing a slow trail across her cheek with his mouth.

“Why do I get the feeling you’re avoiding the subject?” she asked, her breath hitching as his tongue skimmed along her ear.

“This is a celebration, is it not?” He shifted beneath the sheet, his knee slipping between her own as he knelt over her, gazing down into her face. “Let us enjoy our victory and leave the rest for another day.” He lowered his lips to her own, quieting her objections with a gentle kiss. “Right now, I only want to focus on how long I can reasonably keep you in this bed.”

He coaxed her with his mouth, drawing a breathy laugh from her as his hand slid along her side. Any desire to argue quickly fled as his lips explored her throat, her eyes closing as she let out a contented sigh. She turned her head to give him better access, whimpering as he traced the column of her neck, her fingers running along his scalp. His body shifted above hers, his lips dipping down onto her collarbone as her eyes fluttered open, quickly widening as her body jerked in shock.

They weren't alone.

She pushed him off of her on instinct, yanking the sheet up to cover herself. Solas’s confused gaze followed her own, settling on the old woman who sat calmly on Isii's couch.

“Falling into old habits, I see,” Flemeth said calmly as Solas scowled at her.

“What are you-”

“Pardon the interruption, Herald,” she said, effectively cutting off Isii’s question. “It seems I will have to borrow him for a few moments.” Her head tilted before she added firmly, “Fen’Harel and I must have a conversation that is long overdue.”

“It can wait,” Solas objected sharply.

“I’m afraid it cannot.”

His jaw clenched, eyes narrowing as he gestured toward his discarded clothing. “Do you mind?”

“Not in the slightest,” Mythal replied, looking more than a little amused.

The Dread Wolf huffed as he tossed back the sheet, pushing his naked body from the bed in a gesture that was surreally petulant coming from him. Mythal at least had the decency to cast her gaze aside, her chin resting on her hand as she stared disinterestedly at the stained glass windows.

“This is entirely unnecessary,” he grumbled, jerking his breeches into place before yanking his tunic off of the floor.



"I grew tired of waiting for you," Flemeth answered flatly. Isii felt the uncomfortable weight of her eyes as they shifted over to the bed. She scooted back against the pillows, wrapping the sheet tighter around herself. "It seems you've been keeping yourself busy in the meantime."

"There is no need to be so childish."

Flemeth cocked a brow. "Do you really want to get into an argument with me about immaturity, falon?" Her tone was difficult to read. It was hard to tell if she was teasing or chiding him - perhaps a bit of both - and his responses were far more irritated than they were genuinely angry. They seemed to hover somewhere between friendly banter and a mother chastising a wayward child.

There were no words to describe how bizarre it was to watch two of her gods snipe at each other in her bedroom.

Fen'Harel shrugged into the last of his clothing, slipping Isii's robe off of her desk before pacing to the bedside. He set it on her lap, leaning down to kiss her forehead. "I'm sorry for this," he whispered, squeezing her hand in his own. "I will return soon."

"Is something wrong?" she asked, nervously eyeing the goddess as she rose from the couch.

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with," he said, offering a weak smile before turning to face Flemeth. Within a few steps, he stood before her, black smoke billowing at her feet, quickly rising to consume them both. Fen'Harel stole a glance back to Isii as the tendrils curled over his shoulders, his expression strained and saddened in a way that made her stomach twist into knots. There was something he wasn't telling her - she was sure of it now - and the way that truth settled over his face left her feeling uneasy.

They disappeared before Isii could draw breath to question it, the dark haze dissipating in the chill night air.

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Fen'Harel breathed heat into his palms, the wind shocking the warmth of Isii's bed from his skin, battering him with pinpricks of snow. He cast a barrier against the elements, letting it slip over him as he paced the now-familiar ruins of the Temple of Sacred Ashes, the stones resting at unnatural angles where they landed against the mountainside. He spared only a brief glance to Mythal as she watched him, her expression grim.

"You have made your point," he muttered, arms crossing against his chest.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"We both know you could have just as easily waited until morning," he said, trying his best to keep his tone level. "You and I have the luxury of time that others do not."

"Others such as her."

"Leave Isii out of this."

"I cannot," she said, closing the distance between them, "because you *will* not. You have dragged her further into this plot than she ever should have gone."

"I had no other choice," he defended. "With the anchor-"

"The anchor should have been a tool for you and nothing more," Mythal corrected, cutting him off.

“In any other mortal, you wouldn’t have thought twice about guiding them in whatever way you deemed necessary to obtain your ends. But when your vessel bears a pretty face, apparently you are incapable of keeping your hands to yourself.”

“Do not make this into something so crass,” he snapped. “She is not some plaything to be so belittled. Without her, I may never have retrieved the orb.”

“You wouldn’t have,” Mythal declared. “The moment your agents led Corypheus to the orb should have sealed that fate. No matter what you may have done, it was meant to lay shattered at your feet. And yet, it is not.” She let out a slow breath, her features softening. “You should never have given your orb to that creature.”

“I was too weak to unlock it after my slumber. The failure was mine. I do not discount how lucky I am to have had it returned to me. The alternative would have been...” He allowed the sentence to go unfinished, unable to shape the words on his tongue.

“I know what you would have done had the orb been destroyed,” she said gravely. His eyes met her own briefly before falling to the rubble. “I know the sacrifices you would have made - the sacrifices we *both* would have made - if she had not succeeded in retrieving it for you. She has my gratitude for that, at least.”

Solas remained silent, unable to meet her eye. He would have done it. As much as he would have hated himself for it, he would have taken Mythal’s power to replace his own, ripped her essence from the vessel she now bore and watched it blacken as he absorbed the spark that had kept it so preserved. He would have done it because he had to. Because the People needed him to.

She stepped closer, the weight of her hand settling on his shoulder. “I would not have blamed you for that choice,” she said softly. “What I cannot understand is why you are delaying now.”

“The Inquisitor... complicates matters,” he murmured. “She knows of my plans, in part. She wants to continue to offer her aid. She knows that I intend to restore what once was-”

“And yet she does not know the cost.”

He cleared his throat, shifting his weight uncomfortably. “I could not tell her then, when she demanded an explanation from me. I risked losing her cooperation if I had been completely forthcoming.”

“You have no more need of her cooperation,” she coaxed. “With the orb in your possession, you could have easily taken the anchor from her while she slept and fled. Do not delude yourself into thinking she is as powerful a leash as you make her out to be.”

“She is not -” He stopped himself abruptly, shaking his head as he paced away from her. “I will proceed. My purpose here has not changed. I simply need more time.”

“You need more time?” she echoed, her voice hardening. “I did not have the luxury of *uthenera* for the last three and a half thousand years, Dread Wolf,” she hissed, her eyes narrowing sharply. “I did not sleep while the world fell into chaos. I have had to live each and every single day since the moment of our parting. I have had to live in flesh that is not my own, to hide myself away from the fear and scorn of these mortals. I have had to survive knowing that my revenge lies within a cage of *your* making, Fen’Harel.” She jabbed a gauntleted finger hard into his chest, her tone chilling. “And I have bided my time. I have waited for you to return to us, to see what your actions have wrought. It has been *two years* since your return and you now have all the pieces necessary to proceed. So forgive me if I am losing patience while you waste your time with some child you

picked up along the way.”

“She is not a child-”

“She has lived, what? Thirty-some years?” she asked with a harsh laugh. “Compared to us, she is a child. She will die a child. However noble she may be, however intelligent or beautiful, however much you may care for her, her life will be over within the blink of an eye. Do you intend to wait another few years, another handful of decades, until she is no longer here to hold you back?” He let out a harsh breath, his jaw clenching tightly, yet he offered no argument. “This world is wrong, Solas,” she said, her tone softening. “You know that. You did what you thought was right, what you thought was necessary. The Evanuris had to be stopped, but the Veil has had repercussions beyond what you ever could have foreseen. And you now have the power to undo that damage.”

“I have not forgotten,” he said flatly. “My goals are the same as they've always been. I know I must walk the din'anshiral for the sake of our people. But these mortals...” He paused, his words hushed as he studied the ruins beneath his feet, “they are not what I expected them to be. For our kind to return-”

“I know,” she soothed. She tipped his chin with her fingers, forcing him to look up into her face. “It is only natural to have second thoughts, Dread Wolf,” she said. “If you did not, you would not be the man I once knew.”

Solas let out a shaking breath, his eyes closing as he pulled away from her touch. He strode toward a broken balustrade, his hands clasped tightly behind his back as he gazed over the mountains. “The Inquisitor thinks she is going to assist me,” he murmured. “I have yet to determine if she might still be a useful asset. And if I simply disappear... she would seek me out.”

“And she would not find you unless you permitted it.” He paused, his brow creased as Mythal's footsteps drew closer. “She is not the source of the problem, old friend. You are. You do not want to leave her.”

He bowed his head, ashamed of the truth of it. He was willing to sacrifice his own life and the lives of countless others for the sake of his people - yet he could not bring himself to leave the Inquisition. In those first days, he barely even thought of the orb, so consumed by the idea that Isii may never recover that the concept of abandoning her was unimaginable. He told himself he would leave once she regained consciousness, when it was clear that she would survive. But then one day slipped into the next, one excuse after another keeping him there. Even tonight, when he wrested control of the Eluvians - he hadn't intended to return to Skyhold in the aftermath. But he did. He walked back into that castle and took her to her bed and allowed himself to pretend for a few more hours that his duty wouldn't eventually drag him from her side.

“I love her,” he admitted in a whisper. “I cannot... I did not plan for this. But I care for her. More than anyone I've ever...” He let the words trail away, his breaths shuddering as Mythal's hand stroked the back of his neck.

“I know, da'fen.” He offered no resistance as she drew him closer, her brow resting against his own as she cupped his cheek. “I am sorry.”

He swallowed hard, his fingers curling around her wrist, his eyes closed tightly. “I know I have to let her go - but I do not know how. In order to do what I must... I cannot protect her from that. And the thought that she might be... That I might...”

“I know,” she repeated, saving him from having to admit it.

He needed to wipe the slate clean. He needed to tear this world apart in order to reshape it into what once was.

And the thought that Isii might be destroyed in the process terrified him.

“She means that much to you?”

“She does.”

Mythal paused, her thumb tracing the hollow of his cheek. “Then save her.”

Solas pulled away from her embrace, peering up at her. “What do you mean?”

“There are those who lie sleeping, Solas. Our people, waiting for you, waiting to wake into the world you will restore.”

“I’m well aware of-”

“She could be one of them.”

His lips parted to object, but he stopped, considering. It was possible. If Isii went into uthenera, if her body was preserved, it would guarantee that she would survive the transition. While everything she knew burned away, Isii would remain. She would awaken in the world she was always meant to have - the world of the elves, of magic, of a history she had always longed to connect to. Even if he did not live to see it, she would.

And yet she would have to live with the knowledge that everything she now holds dear would be gone. Forever.

He knew that feeling all too well. But unlike him, she would have no small hope to cling to, no reason to believe that what she had lost could ever be restored.

“She would never agree to it,” Solas said.

“Who said anything about giving her a choice in the matter?”

He took a step back, his stomach turning at the thought. Forcing her into the long sleep... abusing the trust he had worked so hard to build with her in order to trick her into such a thing...

“No. I... I cannot do that to her,” he said, shaking his head. “I cannot take away her ability to choose for herself.”

“Would you rather see her dead?” Mythal asked pointedly. “Is that an easier fate for you to accept?”

He turned away from her, grasping the railing as his jaw clenched. “What happens if you continue this charade, Dread Wolf?” she continued. “What happens when she learns the full truth of what you will sacrifice to bring back our world? Our people? This last year has merely given her a taste of what happens when the Veil is no longer in place. When she learns that this world will be thrown into chaos in order to restore what once was - she would try to stop you, falon. You *know* this. She has already given too much of herself to protect this world and the people within it. What will you do when the day comes that she raises her weapon against you?”

“She wouldn’t-”

“You cannot assume that her love for you will stop her. Or have you forgotten that the man who

struck me down claimed to have the same affection for me?"

"She is *nothing* like Elgar'nan," he snapped, his knuckles paling as his grip tightened.

"Be that as it may, it doesn't change the truth of the matter. How far are you willing to go if she turns against you? Could you bring yourself to have her die by your own hand in order to keep her from standing in your way?"

"*Stop*," he choked out, his eyes stinging as he squeezed them shut. "Please, just... Stop."

Her hand went to his shoulder once more, squeezing it reassuringly. "I am sorry, old friend. I know this hurts you." He couldn't bring himself to reply as she forced him to turn toward her. "Many will die in the days to come." She cupped his face in her hands, her expression pained with sympathy as she studied him. "I simply worry about what it would do to you if she was among them."

"You cannot ask me to do this," he whispered, his eyes downcast.

"I am not. The choice is yours, Solas. I am offering you a way to save her - to save us all." Her lips pressed against his brow as he let out a heavy breath. "You know what has to be done. All I ask is that you do not fail me again."

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Dawn was breaking - the sky gradually lightening over the mountainside, brushing the darkness away with strokes of pink fading into gold. Isii smiled as she felt his hands slip over her waist, drawing his body against her back as he tucked his face along the side of her neck. She rested her arms over his, holding them against her as she stared out over the view from her balcony.

"Is everything alright?"

Fen'Harel did not answer - he simply tightened his grip as his lips pressed against her throat. She laced her fingers with his own, squeezing his hand. "Solas, what's wrong?"

"Nothing." His tone did not convince her, his voice sounding strangely hollow as he murmured into her shoulder.

"I know that's not true, vhenan." She turned her head to glance back at him. "What did Mythal want?"

He hesitated, his brow stitched with concern as his eyes scanned the horizon. "She simply wished to speak with me. She is... concerned that I have allowed myself to become distracted from my duty."

"Because of me?" He didn't respond, but the way his lips tightened into a thin line told her enough. She loosened his hold on her, turning in his arms. "I don't want to hold you back, Solas. Whatever the next step is, I am ready to take it."

He stared down at her, his fingertips tracing along her jaw, pressing the warmth of his palms to her cheeks - yet he did not return the smile that spread over her lips. Instead he looked troubled - unsettled by whatever the goddess had said to him.

"I love you, Isii," he whispered. "I would do whatever I could to keep you safe. You know that, right?"

"Of course I do."

His eyes closed as he kissed her brow, his fingers sinking into her hair as he drew her against his chest. She wrapped her arms around him, running soothing circles against his back with her hand. "I cannot face the possibility that I may lose you again."

"You're not going to lose me," she reassured him.

He was silent for a time as he held her. She tightened her grip, nuzzling against his tunic, listening to his breaths as they sharpened. "No," he finally said, sounding resigned. "I will not."

She tilted her head up, her lips brushing his cheek as she slid her hand into his own. "Come on," she coaxed, inching toward the doorway. "Come back to bed."

But he did not move to follow, squeezing her hand gently before letting it fall from his grasp. "In a moment," he muttered. "Go. Rest. I will join you soon."

Isii paused, watching him cautiously before retreating to her bedroom, leaving him to his thoughts.

## Chapter End Notes

falon - friend

din'anshiral - journey of death

da'fen - little wolf

## Chapter 26

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Isii woke slowly, stretching beneath her covers, her fingers grazing over the empty space beside her. She frowned, opening her eyes to peer groggily around her quarters. She found Solas standing near her desk, quietly slipping into his tunic.

“Good morning, vhenan.”

He turned at the sound of her sleepy greeting, though his expression didn’t brighten as it normally would. Instead, his gaze fell away again. “I apologize if I woke you.”

Isii hummed, clearing her throat as she sat up, rubbing the base of her palm against her eye. “I’m surprised you didn’t find me in the Fade last night.”

“I could not sleep.”

Isii frowned, hugging her knees to her chest as she watched him, silent as he secured his belt around his waist. “Are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing,” he said quietly, slipping the jawbone’s cording around his neck.

“Don’t lie to me, Fen’Harel.” His eyes met hers only briefly before he straightened the necklace against his chest. “I’m not blind, vhenan. I know when something is on your mind that you’re not telling me. And I’m pretty damn certain that when Mythal herself shows up in my bedroom to whisk you away, that doesn’t fall under *things I don’t need to concern myself with*. You can’t just brush that off and act like I don’t deserve an explanation when you return.” Solas remained silent, his eyes cast elsewhere as she anxiously bunched the bedsheets between her fists. “You promised me that there wouldn’t be any more secrets between us. So if it’s something important, you would tell me. Right?”

He glanced at her from the corner of his eye, his expression clouded and difficult to read. “Of course,” he muttered.

Isii let out a slow breath. “I want to trust you. I spent too long looking for reasons to make you my enemy and I don’t want to do that anymore.”

He stared at her for a long moment before shaking his head. “No,” he murmured. “I do not want that either.”

“So then talk to me,” she urged him. “I deserve to know what’s going on, don’t I?”

“The truth is...” Solas stopped suddenly, his brow furrowing.

“Yes?” she coaxed him.

He wet his lips before his expression fell, his eyes falling back to the floor. “It concerns the anchor,” he murmured, sounding defeated.

“I’m listening.”

“That mark was no accident. True, it was never intended for you, but when I said that it was never

meant to lie within a mortal host... that was not a mere supposition.”

“What do you mean?”

“The anchor is dangerous, vhenan,” he said gravely, meeting her eyes. “Given enough time... It will kill you.”

Isii’s lips parted in shock. “And you never thought to mention this to me?”

“There was little I could do until my power was restored,” he said quickly, stepping briskly toward her side of the bed. “Even then, all I could hope to achieve was destroying the anchor entirely. As long as Corypheus possessed the orb, ridding you of the mark was not an option.” His brows rose pleadingly. “Please believe me when I say I never wanted you to suffer because of the anchor. I did not tell you because... because I felt it unnecessary to make you worry about something we could not afford to change.”

Isii’s eyes lowered, her thumb running over the gnarled scar on her palm. “That’s why you were always so attentive. Whenever the anchor flared up, you’d ask to take a look at it. To study it...”

“Yes. I wanted to make certain that it was still stable. That you were still safe. And so far, you have been. But the longer it remains within you...” He reached out, cupping her cheek. “I do not know how long it would take. A year? Two? Eventually that power would consume you.”

“Consume me?”

He winced at the fear in her voice, pained sympathy written across his features as he looked down into her eyes. “We may be alike in many ways, vhenan, but we are not the same. This mark was never meant to be held within one of your kind. The fact that you survived its transfer in the first place is miraculous. When I first saw you, I never thought...” His words trailed off as he sat along the edge of the bed. “I doubted you would last this long,” he murmured sorrowfully. “Even though you have surpassed my expectations, that does not change the fact that your body, your connection to the Fade... They are not strong enough for you to hold that energy indefinitely.” He took her hand in his, encircling it completely with his own. “Allow me to rid you of that burden.”

“We still need it,” she countered. “There are still reports of rifts-”

“Rifts that I can close myself, if I bear the anchor in your stead.”

Isii hesitated, her head tilting. “I thought you said that the only way to remove it would be to destroy it.”

His eyes shifted to her desk, eyeing their prized artifact. “True. But only if you lack the orb that originally contained it.” He reached out with one hand, lifting the carved sphere with a brush of his magic, allowing it to land delicately against his outstretched fingers. “Now I have the power to transfer it safely from you... into me. As it should have been from the start.”

“And it won’t hurt you?”

He seemed surprised by the question before a quiet amusement curled his lips. “No, vhenan,” he reassured her. “The mark will not hurt me.” His free hand slid against the back of her neck, drawing her forward into a soft kiss. “I need you to trust me,” he whispered, his brow pressed to hers. “Let me take the anchor.”

Isii idly flexed her fingers as she drew a small hint of the mark’s energy to the surface - just enough that she could feel that familiar thrumming in her skin. When this all began, she would have leapt



at the chance to have it removed, to be allowed to return to her clan and her old life. Yet when faced with the opportunity to have her wish, she couldn't help but feel apprehensive. It was a part of her now. It's what made her special. It's why people chose to listen to her, to follow her. It was a piece of the past living beneath her skin, a piece of Elvhenan, a piece of *him*.

It's why Fen'Harel needed her. Wasn't that what Mythal was getting at in the Fade? She was a useful tool for him because she had the anchor. What was she to him without it?

If Solas said the anchor was dangerous, then it must be true. He only wanted to protect her. It was safer for him to carry it.

After all, he wasn't going anywhere. The Inquisition could still use it.

Isii consented with a quiet nod.

Solas smiled, relieved as he opened her palm, pressing his lips against the mark. "Brace yourself," he murmured, resting her hand against the orb. "This may be painful."

"How painful?"

He frowned, considering as he lifted his hand, his fingers dancing delicately through the air as the carved crevices began to glow. "Not as painful as when you obtained it, I would assume." He took a deep breath, curving his left palm against the orb. Isii closed her eyes, trying to focus on her breathing, swallowing her apprehension as the energy in her palm stirred into life. "Relax as best you can," he soothed her. "The more you resist... the more difficult this will be."

Despite his warning, the sudden surge of pain that followed took her by surprise. Her eyes snapped open as heat burst through her arm, sizzling along her nerves, driving the air from her lungs in a harsh rasp. She would have reflexively pulled away from the orb were it not for the Dread Wolf's hand clamping hard around her wrist, forcing her to maintain contact as she squirmed. He whispered an apology, his brow furrowed in concentration as his hold on her tightened, keeping her from bucking away. Light poured from the anchor, spilling over the pair of them, swirling and twisting around their arms, their hands, weaving in and out like a rope binding them together. It would have been a beautiful sight to behold if it did not feel like her flesh was being flayed. Isii bit into her lip, unable to keep a guttural sob from escaping her as her heels dug into the mattress, tears stinging the corners of her eyes as she squeezed them shut. This felt wrong, as if the anchor did not *want* to go, *could not* go, as if they were joined so thoroughly that separating them would destroy her in the process.

Yet no sooner had that fear entered her mind than the pain suddenly stopped. Isii sucked in a breath, shuddering as Solas let the orb fall to the bed, drawing her closer to him. Healing magic hummed from his fingertips as he touched her, carefully inspecting the small bead of blood that had formed on her lip. He brushed her tears away, soothing her, whispering quiet apologies as she struggled to steady her lungs. Isii flexed her hand, examining it for any damage and felt nothing. No pain. No discomfort. *No magic*. She stared at the gnarled scar across her palm and experimentally tried to summon the anchor. But there was no green light. No humming buzz. Just the ugly remnants of a wound. When the Dread Wolf took her hand in his, when he kissed the scar, she no longer felt his mana the way she used to. She didn't feel the anchor stir, quickening like a heartbeat, like drawing to like. Just the warmth of his lips and nothing more.

She took his left hand in her own, inspecting the smooth skin of his palm. "Did it work?"

The Dread Wolf lifted his hand, testingly flexing his fingers and they both watched as a streak of bright light unfurled from his palm. It was elegant in a way hers had not been, like ink from an

unseen quill spilling down the length of his fingers rather than the crude maw that had burst from her flesh. He stared at it for a time, emerald light dancing across contemplative features before he curled his hand into a fist, the anchor closing once more.

“Thank you,” he said, strangely somber as he tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. “You do not know how important this is. What this means to me.”

“I think I have a pretty good idea.” She massaged her hand as he rose from the bed.

“There is... something I must do now,” he said distractedly. “I will grant you some privacy so you may dress for the day.”

“Since when do I need to be alone for that?” she asked, amused. “It’s not like you haven’t seen it all before. Quite recently, in fact. In great detail.”

“True,” he said. “Still, I should-”

“Can you hand me my breastband?” Isii gestured toward the discarded garment, still in the same spot it had landed after he tore it off of her the night before. He obeyed, making no further objection as Isii slipped off of the mattress, stripping out of her nightclothes.

“So when do we start with the next part of your plan?” she asked, taking the breastband from his outstretched hand.

“Hmm?”

“Don’t play coy, Solas,” she said, grinning as she secured the garment. “As much as I’m enjoying this little post-Corypheus reprieve, I’m honestly itching to see what comes next.”

“Is that so?”

“I’ve been dreaming about Elvhenan since I was a child, Fen’Harel,” she said, closing the distance between them, her hands skimming across his chest as she smoothed out the wrinkles in his tunic. “The idea that we could give that back to our people... It’s everything I’ve ever wanted.”

“Our people...” He seemed strangely distracted for a moment, his gaze distant as he frowned.

“I know you don’t think highly of the Dalish,” she offered, padding over to the chest at the foot of her bed, fishing out a clean pair of breeches. “In retrospect, I can see why. But you have to understand... this is exactly what the Dalish strive for.” She shimmied the snug pants over her hips, tightening the laces. “The elvhen rising up once more, not just preserving our past but letting the old ways thrive? It’s everything I’ve been raised to want for my people.” Her smile broadened as she slipped her tunic over her head. “You and I are going to make that a reality. How extraordinary is that?” she added, pecking him quickly on the cheek.

Fen’Harel stepped back, his hands gently pushing on her arms. “Ah.”

“Ah?” Isii echoed with a laugh. “I’m talking about altering the very fabric of existence and all you have to add to that is *ah*? You’re a man of very few words, vhenan.”

“There is...” He hesitated, his gaze darting to the balcony before a subtle shake of his head dispelled the worry from his brow. “There is somewhere I need to take you. There are components I need... steps to be taken before we can proceed.”

Isii slipped her hands into his, smiling up at him. “I’ll go wherever you take me, Dread Wolf.

We're in this together. I want to see it through to the end."

Fen'Harel studied her features before resting his brow against her own.

"I will make certain that you do."

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Solas's eyes idly scanned the tavern below, his fingertips mindlessly tracing the gnarled grooves worn into the wooden railing before him. He barely offered a glance to the woman who approached him, keeping his eyes forward as she settled beside him.

"I apologise for the short notice," he said quietly. "It appears I will no longer require your services here as I had anticipated."

"I am yours to command, my Lord." Fen'Harel turned his head, a single arched brow offering a subtle reminder. The elven woman caught herself mid-bow, stiffly correcting her posture. "Apologies," she muttered.

The Herald's Rest did not have many patrons at that moment to bear witness, but that was no excuse for them to ignore the roles they both had to play. He was nothing more than a wandering apostate and Ena was merely one of the faithful, drawn to the Inquisition in the aftermath of Isii's victory.

The Dread Wolf drew a small letter, folded and sealed with wax, from the confines of his vest. "I need you to return to Shalasha'or Revas'an. Take this. Read it on your way there. Make the necessary arrangements for our arrival."

"*Our* arrival, Ser?" Ena asked, secreting the parchment into the pocket of her worn woolen dress.

"I'm afraid the Inquisitor's residence in Skyhold will draw to a close much sooner than I had anticipated," he said flatly.

"You're bringing the Herald to—" He silenced her incredulity with a look. Ena pressed her lips together, her gaze lowering. "As you wish," she added quickly with an appropriately-subtle bow of her head. "I will make certain that whatever preparations you require are attended to."

"Our original timeline will likely be accelerated from this point forward," he said. "Now that I have the anchor in my possession, I want to make certain everything is ready before I act. We must be prepared for the chaos that follows and maintain stability as best we can during the transition. I will be able to grant out people a second chance, but there will not come a third. There can be no room for error."

"Understood," Ena replied. "And the Evanuris?"

Solas stared down into the tavern, his expression growing grim. "Leave them to me."

"What're you two being all whispery about?"

Solas turned at the sound of Sera's voice, his lips drawing into a thin line as the woman approached, quickly perching herself along the railing next to them. "Oh," Ena exclaimed, brightening her demeanor with an unassuming smile. "Sorry. I'm visiting Skyhold. Master Solas was kind enough to answer a few of my questions."

"*Master* Solas?" Sera repeated with a snort. "Careful with that. If his head gets any further up his

own ass, he'll get stuck."

"I... should probably get going," Ena said stiffly, her lips pursed to resist showing any sign of amusement. "Thank you for your assistance, Solas. I will make certain it is repaid."

"Ma serannas, lethallan." He dismissed her with a nod, his scowl meeting Sera's toothy grin as his agent swiftly made her way down the stairs.

"Aww, why so pouty, droopy ears?" she asked, cocking a brow. "Did I embarrass you in front of the pretty lady?" She let out a whistle, her legs swinging as she leaned back over the railing. "Look 'it you, gettin' all chummy with another elfy elf right after getting yourself back in Quizzie's pants. S'not like half of Skyhold didn't see you runnin' off to her bedroom during the party last night."

"That is none of your concern," he said, pacing toward the stairwell.

"Oh don't get yourself in a snit," Sera chided, walking along the railing. "You know I'm just messing with you."

"If you will excuse me, I have preparations to make."

"What, you going somewhere?" she asked, gracefully hopping down onto the step in front of him, blocking his path. His frown deepened as he pushed past her. Sera let out a hiss. "Well you're in a mood, aren't ya? I was only askin' cause I'm insanely bored here. Been mostly cooped up in these mountains since all that creepy temple shit and I'm itching to stretch my legs. So if you two are going somewhere, I might want in."

"No," he said quickly. A little *too* quickly. Sera's eyes narrowed.

"Since when are you making that call? Isn't that Isii's decision?"

Solas pushed through the tavern's doorway, walking briskly toward Skyhold's main entrance. "Normally, yes. I am merely saving you the time of having to ask her yourself. The answer would still be no."

"Ooooooh," Sera cooed. "I see what this is. The two of you are sneakin' off for a bit of alone time, huh? Get yourselves all hot and bothered wandering around some elfy ruins and pull a horizontal victory lap on this whole Coryphy-shits situation."

Solas paused, stopping to pinch the bridge of his nose, letting out a sigh. "Your way with words is truly a unique and memorable experience, Sera. I will grant you that."

"I'm not wrong, am I?"

"Wrong about what?"

Solas didn't have the chance to react before Sera cheerfully replied to the Commander's question. "About these two boring elves doing their bit for the Empire, humpin' their way across Thedas. Right, Quizzles?" Solas turned to find Cullen and Isii standing side by side, their path across the courtyard intersecting with Sera's and his own.

*Oh for the love of...*

"Well this is news to me," Isii said, stifling a laugh.

“What she means, Commander,” Solas began impatiently as Cullen stared back at Sera, temporarily stunned by the unexpected response, “is that the Inquisitor and I are taking a trip. One that should be of absolutely no interest to Sera, as she has repeatedly made it clear she has no interest in exploring the remnants of Elvhenan,” he added sharply.

“Oh,” Cullen mumbled, clearing his throat. “That’s...” His brow furrowed as he glanced down to Isii. “You didn’t tell me you were going anywhere.”

“We only just made the plans this morning, falon,” she said warmly. “I was going to tell you once I’d gotten a chance to write up the usual report on our expected itinerary and route. You can expect it on your desk before we leave tonight.”

“Tonight?” he echoed. “Isn’t that a little sudden? What’s the emergency?”

“Are you trying to figure out if you need to send reinforcements?” she asked with a laugh, her hand slipping comfortably over his arm. “There’s no need to worry, Cullen. Solas and I are just taking advantage of the relative peace to do some exploring.”

“*Maker*, the two of you are boring,” Sera grumbled, eyes rolling before she turned and strolled back toward the tavern. “You come up with a real job, you lemme know.”

“Josephine won’t like it,” Cullen muttered to Isii.

“Josephine is more than capable of handling any diplomatic issues until I get back.”

“How long will the two of you be gone?” Cullen asked, shifting his gaze to Solas.

“Two weeks,” the Dread Wolf said, quickly constructing the lie.

*Two weeks.* That would give them time. Chances are it wouldn’t be until the third week that her advisors would grow concerned about the Inquisitor’s disappearance. By the time any serious search began, she would have been gone a month and the trail would have grown cold.

Not that he needed to be that careful. Where they were going, the Inquisition could not follow.

The Commander pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I suppose...”

“I have complete faith that you will manage to hold the Inquisition together for a measly two weeks,” Isii teased, grinning up at him before glancing over to Solas. “Speaking of which, we really should go pack our things...”

“Agreed,” he said, offering his arm. Isii’s smile broadened as she took it, her touch falling away from Cullen.

“In case I don’t see you again before we leave, Commander,” she said, glancing over her shoulder. “Take care of yourself. Try not to work too hard. You’ve been running ragged recently and I want you rested up by the time I get back.”

“Is that an order?” he asked, a hint of a smile on his lips.

“Yes, if that means you won’t ignore it,” she answered with a lighthearted laugh, strolling with Solas toward the main entrance into the Keep.

He could not help but feel some level of guilt as they walked. Cullen was her friend, someone important to her, and yet she was unaware that this was likely the last time she would ever speak

with the man. There were others here, too. Others whom she cared about. People she would regret parting from in such a manner.

But if she said her goodbyes, it would only raise suspicions. It would lead to questions he could not answer.

No. It was better this way.

In a few days time, she would understand.

She may come to hate him for what must follow, but she would understand.

He would protect her. No matter what.

## Chapter End Notes

translations:

Shalasha'or Revas'an - The Shield of the Place where Freedom Dwells

Ma serannas, lethallan - Thank you, cousin/kin/one of my own kind

Falon - friend

## Chapter 27

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The campsite rustled with the sounds of faint movement as Isii slowly awoke - the light scrape of metal brushing against metal creating a quiet shooshing noise she couldn't quite identify.

Their trip so far had been a pleasant one. She still wasn't certain where they were going; Fen'Harel only spoke of their destination in vague terms. In truth, she was simply enjoying the time she got to spend with him. It had been so long since they'd truly been alone together. No Inquisition. No Corypheus. No companions to interrupt when the urge to kiss him struck, or when those same urges coaxed her to straddle his lap, teasing his belt loose. It felt surreal in a way, to be like this again after everything that had passed between them. It felt more exposed, raw, as if those painful months of separation had stripped away the walls they'd built between them. When she reached for him, when she pressed her body to his own, she could see him for everything he was. An ancient. A rebel. A lost man just trying to make things right. Someone who loved her so much that it hurt. And in those moments he belonged to her, as she belonged to him.

And yet something about his demeanor seemed different. Isii could not quite identify what it was; the way he looked at her, perhaps - the way his eyes lingered, his mouth turned at the corners. The expression would quickly vanish whenever she caught him staring, however. He would smile, a quiet, patient smile, and his expression would warm into fondness.

She'd caught him staring at her a number of times since they left Skyhold; as if he was trying to memorize every detail.

Isii stretched, reluctantly replacing the warmth of her bedroll with her jacket. She was only halfway out of their tent when she paused, blinking in confusion. "Oh," she murmured, startled as Fen'Harel glanced up. A slow smile spread on her lips as she looked him over. "That's... different."

Solas shifted self-consciously in his armor as he went back to securing the baldric that hung across his chest. His garb was not unlike the sort Mythal's Sentinels wore; a base of delicate chainmail stacked with plate and cloth, a deep hood hanging loosely at the nape of his neck. His greaves covered most of him from hip to foot, the tarnished gold fitting snugly around his musculature. A sloped cuirass accentuated the slimness of his waist in a way his usual attire did not, layered with belts and buckles, burnished silver and gold intermingling along his arms, his fingertips. Only one shoulder bore a delicately decorated pauldron, the other covered only in the sleeve of his jacket.

"I'm guessing the armor accounts for the extra weight you've been hauling around?" she asked. The Dread Wolf merely nodded as he reached for a small pelt of light tawny fur, wrapping it around his bicep as he untucked a length of leather cording from his belt. Isii watched as he slowly tried to bind the piece into place, his brow furrowed in frustration before she wordlessly offered her assistance. "And here I thought we were having a nice, leisurely trip," she teased, criss-crossing the leather strap as she twisted it around his arm, tying it into place. "Are we going into battle?"

"In a manner of speaking," he said quietly.

Isii frowned. "Should I be bracing myself for combat?"

"No," he reassured her, retrieving a larger pelt that lay across his pack. "Nothing so dramatic as that. But we will reach our destination before nightfall." He slung the fur over his shoulder,

strapping it into place along his waist.

“And wherever you’re taking me requires armor?”

“Skyhold is your castle. Your stronghold. I am taking you to mine,” he answered. “One of them, at least,” he added. He watched the way her gaze dipped, studying his attire curiously. “Do not forget that the image you have had of me thus far has been the result of a calculated decision,” he explained calmly. “I shaped my appearance to suit the perception I required from others. This is no different.”

“Trading one mask for another?” He considered for a moment before nodding. Isii smoothed her fingers over the fur across his chest, looking up into his face. “So the humble apostate gets rags, but Fen’Harel requires something befitting a god.”

“Not a god,” he corrected firmly, backing away from her touch. “But a leader, nonetheless.”

Isii tilted her head curiously. “And who do you lead, exactly?”

Solas smiled, his brows lifting. “You did not think I worked alone, did you?”

“That would match your reputation, Dread Wolf.”

He laughed softly, shaking his head. “I have my own forces. Agents. Spies. Individuals joined to a common cause. Some of those who follow me now have done so for millenia. They knew me through the lens of rebellion - through countless wars and bloodshed.” He grabbed his pack, securing it once more. “The face they know is that of a general, so that is the one I show them. Hence, the armor.”

“Don’t you ever get tired of it?”

“Of what?”

“Pretending,” she murmured. “Being what you want people to see.”

He hesitated, lips parting to speak before closing again. “We should ready ourselves to leave—”

“That’s not an answer.”

He had no reply, studying her face silently as she let out a slow breath. “I find it exhausting, personally. Before all this, when we were just the Herald and the apostate; you were the only person who made me feel like I could just be myself. I didn’t have to perform for you. I didn’t have to impress you or pretend to be something holy or blessed or invulnerable.” She reached over, cupping his cheek, guiding his gaze down to meet her own. “And I want to be that for you, Solas. I want you to know, you never have to pretend with me. Even if you wear a mask with everyone else... you don’t have to do that when it’s just us.”

He looked almost pained as he stared back at her, but the expression quickly cooled into a more neutral state. “Thank you,” he murmured softly, taking her by the wrist as he drew her hand away. “Pack your things. Take only what you wish to keep for sentimental value. The rest, we will leave behind.”

“What?”

“We will not need the surplus of supplies once we arrive at our destination.”



“So we’re just ditching our campsite?” she asked, peering at him. “That seems needlessly wasteful. Surely the Inquisition should recover the supplies.”

“A patrol should find it eventually.”

Isii frowned. “This region has been secure for months. Patrols here ceased weeks ago.” Strange. She would have assumed he’d known that. “Is it possible to divert our route? Stop off at one of our sites, drop off the gear and-”

“No,” he said quickly. A little too quickly. The furrow in Isii’s brow deepened. “Perhaps... Perhaps after we arrive,” he said, backpedaling slightly, “I could have word sent to one of your nearby encampments to inform them. Though I doubt a single tent and a few bedrolls are valuable enough to trouble yourself over.”

She studied his face but his expression was unreadable, save for a slight discomfort in his eyes as he briefly averted them from her gaze. “Alright,” she said slowly, nodding. “Give me a moment to gather my things. I shouldn’t be long.”

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The Dread Wolf led her off the beaten path, down a steep, sloping trail whose markers seemed as clear to him as they were invisible to her. She was half-concerned he’d gotten them lost when his magic sparked, light swirling around an easily-overlooked pile of stones. They lifted, separating, pulling gracefully away to reveal steps set deep into the earth. Isii glanced at Fen’Harel skeptically as he gestured for her to enter, flaring light around the end of her staff as she descended wordlessly into the darkness.

He reset the stones with another wave of his hand after following her in.

The structure that greeted her was unfamiliar. Elvhen, certainly. It was not so pristine as Mythal’s temple and yet appeared undisturbed, tarnished only by the passage of time. The shadows stretched eerily from the glow of her staff as they walked, her eyes struggling to make sense of the shapes around her. There were wide pools set into the floor and the sound of water trickling. The walls were decorated luxuriously, though much of the paint and dulled and chipped away over time. She passed by one mural that showed an elf attended by servants, seemingly being bathed by them, surrounded by small pillars of flame.

Perhaps this was a bathhouse of some sort.

They continued to walk, the Dread Wolf slowing occasionally so that he would not outpace her as he guided her through a confusing series of twisting passageways. The sound of moving water faded as they passed into a chamber filled with large stone slabs, rectangular in shape, each rising a few feet off of the floor.

The fact that they were each roughly the size of a body made the room look undeniably like a crypt.

“What is this place?” she asked, her voice hushed amidst the whispering echo that followed it.

“Nothing of importance,” he murmured, slipping his hand reassuringly into her own. “We are only passing through.”

The room stretched well beyond the reach of her light and even Isii’s elven eyes could not pierce beyond the shadows to see the walls that she knew must be there. Still, she let him gently lead her by the hand and after passing by what she could only assume were countless sarcophagi, Isii finally

spotted the first glimmer of reflection. The Eluvian stood tall, nearly reaching the high ceiling. The Dread Wolf loosened his grasp, releasing her hand in order to retrieve something from the small satchel at his hip. It was a gem of some sort, a stone no bigger than his palm that he brought to his lips, whispering under his breath as the tarnished glass began to glow, a liquid hue that shifted and changed as the passage opened. He tucked the stone away again, offering her his hand once more.

Isii was eager to leave the eeriness of the tomb behind her, lacing her fingers with his own as the Dread Wolf pulled her through the mirror.

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She had no clear sense of how long they walked, moving from mirror to mirror, slipping in and out of the spaces between the real world and the Fade. Some of the paths through the crossroads were broken and yet Fen'Harel repaired them with relative ease, suspending stones in midair to aid their progress. They felt solid enough under her feet as she walked, though Isii tried her best not to look down. The drop was nauseating in its endlessness. A mere glance was enough to make her feel as though she was already falling with no ground in sight to stop her descent.

Whenever he caught her gaze drifting downward, Solas would reach out and touch her. A small reminder. She was safe. He would not let her come to harm.

The blinding daylight was disorienting once they finally emerged from the last mirror. She was certain enough hours had passed that the sun should have already set - a stark reminder of the vast distance they must have just crossed. Isii looked around, trying to orient herself, searching for clues as to where they might be. The platform they stood on rested atop a high tower, bridged by a stone pathway that connected it to a larger structure. The castle was built into a cliffside, frothy waves striking the jagged rocks below in violent bursts, the salted air battering her cheeks. They were on a coast... but which one? She couldn't see anything familiar no matter where she looked. No buildings. No settlements. Just an endless sea of water, stone and sand, buffered by mountains on all sides.

"Vhenan."

Solas's voice drew her attention back to him as he stood a few paces ahead of her, glancing over his shoulder. She stepped down from the mirror's edge to join him on the bridge and he rested his hand gently against the small of her back as they continued along the path. "Keep your chin raised," he murmured. "Eyes forward. Walk at my side, never behind me. No matter what you see, do not allow your confidence to visibly waver. Do not give anyone the opportunity to question that you belong here."

Nerves fluttered in her stomach, but she nodded. "Do you expect anyone to object?"

"Not to my face," he said flatly. "Though dissent spread in secret is always more dangerous than that stated directly."

She took a steadying breath, shifting her posture and expression accordingly. This was no different than her time in Halamshiral - though in truth, she'd entered the Winter Palace with a better understanding of the crowd she was walking into. Was Solas truly concerned that his followers would not approve of her presence? Why? Was she not just like them, just as committed to the cause? She wanted the Veil to come down. She wanted to see the restoration of everything that had been taken from the elves. She almost died retrieving the orb. Wasn't that proof enough of her dedication?

Lights flickered ahead as they drew close to the end of the bridge, spirits coalescing into the shape

of elven sentinels. They were armed, a halo of swirling light silhouetting their forms. One stood ahead of the rest, his stance relaxed as he greeted them in Elvhen. "*Atish'all vallem, Fen'Harel elathadra.*" Isii stalled for a step, hesitating, yet the Dread Wolf drew closer without concern. She did her best to hide the falter in her pace. "*Nuvenas mana helanin,*" the spirit continued, "*dirth'bellasa ma.*"

Isii had conversed with spirits countless times since meeting Solas. He guided her dreams, introducing her to the friends he kept in the Fade, teaching her how to approach them with an open heart so that neither she nor the spirits would pose a threat to one another. She knew that when one offered a formal greeting, it was best to return the gesture. She wet her lips, her chin lifted. "*Andaran atish'an. Setheran-*"

The shift in their mood was swift, weapons raised as the spirits braced themselves for combat. "*Virthar na,*" the faceless one in front of her snapped as Isii took a startled step back. "*Na din'an-*"

"*Venavis.*"

Solas's stern command caused the spirits to freeze in place, motionless and yet still menacing. "*Ar-melana dirthavaren,*" he continued calmly. "*Revas vir-anaris.*"

The spirits relaxed once more, postures straightening as they lowered their weapons. "*Ame lethalas,*" the lead spirit murmured, bowing his head. The group dissipated, their forms growing indistinct and hazy before disappearing altogether.

"My apologies," Solas said softly. "I neglected to warn you not to engage with them directly."

"Why were they going to attack?" Isii asked, her brows lifting. "I didn't-"

"Those guards are not conscious entities - not like Cole or the other spirits you've encountered," he said as he crossed over the end of the bridge, approaching the castle wall. "They cannot converse as such. All they understand is the passphrase I just recited - if they hear anything else in response to their query, they will become aggressive. Their purpose is to guard this place, and others like it, from potential threats."

They came to a stop, their path cutting off at the edge of the castle. What she had assumed at a distance to be a doorway was actually an oversized mosaic set into a tapered arch. Green gems glittered in the sun, the image of a wolf staring down at them. She ran her fingers curiously along its edge, but the seal was solid. There was no getting through. Before she could ask for clarification, Solas instructed her to step back, the anchor flaring to life in his palm. She watched as he raised his hand, strands of light lifting like smoke from the mosaic, drawing into the opening in his flesh. There was something graceful to the motion, an effortlessness that the anchor had never had with her. Soon, the wall before them dissolved, drawn into the ever-brightening light as an unfamiliar feeling washed over her. It was as if an echo touched her mind - she could hear it, feel it on her skin, a sensation of safety and security and welcome, an unspoken understanding that this was Fen'Harel's domain and there was no more reason for fear. She would be protected here.

Her eyes met his and he offered a small smile as he closed his fist, releasing the anchor. "It is an effect of the barrier. You grow accustomed to it, after a time," he said. "Pass through this way often enough and you may even grow tired of experiencing it."

She had a hard time believing that. The magic left a tingle on her skin, feeling strangely elated by its touch. She grinned up at him as she offered him her arm. "Shall we?"

He considered a moment before slipping his arm around hers, folding his opposite hand over her own. He leaned over, kissing her brow before resting his own against it. “Remember, vhenan,” he whispered, “you are here as my equal.”

The weight of that nearly sent a shiver through her. No matter what he said he was, there were countless people over the centuries who believed in his divinity. For all she knew, his own followers believed he was truly a god. To think that he would have her there at his side, in front of his own people, not his guest or merely his lover, but as his *equal*...

She nodded, nuzzling briefly against his cheek before he pulled away, straightening his posture.

Isii Lavellan stepped out of the daylight, a smile on her lips as the Dread Wolf led her into his lair.

## Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR PATIENCE! It's taken me longer to update than I'd like... but we're so close to the finish line and I really want to wrap things up for those of you who have stuck with me through this long, strange process. Thank you so much for all of your feedback, your enthusiasm and for sticking around this long. I can't say enough how much I appreciate it.

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### Translation:

Most of the elvhen used in this chapter comes straight from Trespasser... which means the translations are a bit difficult to pin down. You can check [my post here on tumblr](#) for my own breakdown of the new vocabulary and my best guess as to what's being said.

Venavis - stop, halt

## Chapter 28

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Isii Lavellan was used to the unsettling sensation of being watched. Ever since the Conclave, she'd had eyes following her wherever she went - as a prisoner, as the Herald, as the Inquisitor. A savior or a savage, a saint or a blasphemous witch - it didn't matter if they loved her or hated her. People watched her. They kept their eyes keenly focused, observing details, making judgements. She'd grown so accustomed to it that it rarely phased her anymore when she strode through Skyhold's main hall or briskly jogged through the courtyard.

Yet she felt each and every one of those gazes now.

Fen'Harel's castle was large - quite unlike anything she'd seen before. Twisting pillars of ancient stone, glass molded in unnatural shapes, the walls painted in murals that wove tales wholly foreign to her understanding. It was tempting to gawk, to stare like some tourist in a strange land, eager to take in every detail. She resisted the urge, though, trying her best to mimic the unflinching demeanor of the Dread Wolf beside her. His eyes remained forward, determined, barely acknowledging those around him as they offered quiet deference. The elves there varied in appearance - marked and unmarked faces staring back at her from alcoves and walkways. Some stood taller than any mortal elf, wide-shouldered, their skin a greyish, sunless hue like the Sentinel's at Mythal's temple. Others appeared exceptionally normal by contrast, wearing attire so modern that she'd never think twice to see them passing in a market or strolling through the woods like some distant Dalish cousin.

Isii wondered how many of them were ancients. Some of them? *All*? Was it even possible that so many had survived? Is that what Solas was doing in the year before the Conclave? Seeking out others like him? Gathering his forces? He said this was only one of his strongholds - were there others, similarly full and brimming with life? There were so many questions she wanted to ask, but she held her tongue, trying instead to focus on his words. *Eyes forward. Chin raised. You belong here.*

Heads bowed, on occasion, respectful words murmured quietly as they passed. Even with such humble gestures of welcome, she felt the weight of their eyes on her. Cold. Analyzing. Some clearly trying to hide their confusion, as if her presence was some unspoken scandal that she could not fully comprehend. She had no doubt that the hush that followed their path through the castle halls would soon be filled with conspiratorial whispers. Solas had been by her side for a full year. He only regained access to the eluvians recently. There was no way he could have come here since joining the Inquisition. No possible means by which he could see to his followers in person. How must it have looked to them to finally see him again with the Inquisitor on his arm? Certainly that wasn't the plan when he'd left them.

An armored woman approached, walking swiftly as if summoned with little notice, clearly trying to maintain her composure despite being winded. Her features were youthful, almost girlish, and yet she carried herself in a way that suggested she was far more mature than her perceived age. "My Lord," she greeted with a bow of her head. "The preparations have been made, as you asked."

"Good." Solas nodded. "Show us."

The woman's eyes flicked only briefly to Isii before she turned on her heel, leading the way. They swept through winding corridors, each turn leaving the Inquisitor more and more disoriented. This

place was certainly built to be impenetrable - she could only imagine that an attempt at a siege would be like setting soldiers upon a maze. She tried to mentally map it nonetheless, and promised herself she would later walk the grounds until they felt second-nature to her.

They came to a long, winding staircase - most likely one of the towers, given the number of steps they ascended. Solas said nothing, yet she felt his grip on her arm gradually tighten, armored fingertips digging into the leather of her sleeve. She stole a glance to his face but his expression told her nothing, solemnly held, his eyes fixed on their path.

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Each step was torturous.

Each drew him closer to a choice he did not want to make.

The feelings he'd been repressing for days threatened to stir like an unseen hand tightening around his throat. Guilt. Shame. He'd been able to tamp them down, to bury them during their journey from Skyhold, yet he could no longer ignore the reality before him.

Here, Isii would be safe. Here, in his most secured stronghold, constantly under guard - no one would dare lay a hand on her as she slept. His followers could keep her body nourished and free from discomfort. He could keep an eye on her. He could keep her from harm. Better here than dragging her to some dank tomb where the others slept, awaiting the fulfillment of his intentions. *No*. She would have a bed. She would be surrounded in softness and comfort, not the cold stone of a sarcophagus. It would be no different than the exalted Dreamers of old - those nobles who were tended to in grand bedchambers as they enjoyed the peace of uthenera. Solas tried to comfort himself with that thought. He would give her what all elves once longed to experience. He would give her the heaven that lay in the deepest reaches of the Fade, unseen but by the luckiest few. He knew that peace firsthand. He knew the contentment that could be found in uthenera and how desperately he wanted to claw his way back into its warm embrace when he first awoke.

It was a hollow comfort. He knew she would hate him for this.

She had every right to. She would wake to find that everything she had known had been taken from her. He knew that feeling intimately - to gaze upon a world wholly foreign to him, horrifyingly unfamiliar, changed beyond recognition.

Only he'd still had the hope of regaining what had been lost to keep him going. She would not.

But she would be alive. That was what mattered to him, more than anything else.

The Inquisition would eventually start looking for her- for them both. He knew they would never manage to track them here. Not even Leliana's cunning could compensate for the lack of access to the eluvians he now controlled. Even if they had some inkling that this place existed, they could not follow. This fortress was buffeted by mountains and an unforgiving sea. The mirrors made for the only safe way in and out.

The stairwell gave way to an antechamber where his agent Ghilan sat, idly reading a book. The man startled to attention as they approached, quickly dropping the tome as he rose to his feet. Solas merely gave him a nod, a sign to be at ease as Ena took her place opposite his, flanking the door to the room beyond. Both presumably knew their orders. They were there to ensure Isii's safety. Neither likely understood just how precious she was to him or why he'd set them to this task- but he did not doubt their loyalty. They would do as they were told.

Solas brushed past them, opening the door and guiding Isii into the chambers beyond. The room was fit for any noble of his age, the grand fireplace sparking into life with the lightest brush of his magic, a warm glow spilling over hand-painted murals and sunlit stained glass. His gaze lingered only briefly on the bed, framed by two basin-topped pillars that he knew bore ceremonial oils. His eyes shied away with discomfort as he closed the door, watching as Isii took in the new surroundings.

“Is this your room?”

“I was hoping it would be yours,” he answered quietly. She circled the space, studying it curiously and yet he couldn’t bring himself to move further in, lingering by the door, stiff-backed and watching her.

“It’s beautiful.” She smiled, pleased.

“I had hoped you would like it.”

“My room, yet not yours?” she asked, eyeing him. “Can’t we continue to share a bed?”

His mouth went dry. “Of course,” he replied, his hand clenching into a fist behind his back. “I simply thought you deserved a place to retire to, should you desire some privacy.” The lie was unavoidable - but it weighed heavily on his tongue, all the same.

“Under guard?” she asked, her brow furrowing slightly as she angled her chin towards the hallway beyond the door.

“For your protection,” he explained. “Experience has taught me that one can never be too careful. I trust my people - but trust is a dangerous tool in the wrong hands.”

*In my hands*, he thought darkly.

Solas did not know if he could go through with this.

His face must have betrayed him for her eyes narrowed, concern tilting her head. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” the Dread Wolf said, smoothing his features as best he could. “I am simply tired after our journey.”

Isii walked with a gentle ease as she approached him, brushing a hand over his cheek. He did his best not to flinch. “Lie with me, then,” she murmured. “It’s been a long day. We both deserve some rest.” She pressed a kiss to his lips. Returning the gesture felt hollow, his stomach twisting. He pulled away, eyes downcast as he cleared his throat.

“Later,” he promised. “There are things I must attend to first.” He met her gaze and tried his best to shape his lips into a convincing smile. “Perhaps you should stay here. Get some rest. When I am finished, I’ll have a bath drawn for you.” He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, smoothing it down. “Would that please you?”

Her grin widened as she nodded. He pressed a tender kiss to her forehead before drawing away. “I will join you shortly,” he whispered, leaving her there as he slipped back through the door. The two guards stood alert, eyeing him as he passed. “She is to remain here for the time being,” he instructed firmly, keeping his voice low. “Should she need anything, have it sent to her.”

He did not wait for their reply before disappearing down the stairwell.

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Isii was growing restless.

She'd done a thorough inspection of the room- studying frescoes, running her fingers along unfamiliar stone carvings, looking out the windows to view an endless, churning sea and the nauseating drop onto the rocks that lay below. He'd told her to rest and though she was tired, she did not feel like sleeping. Not yet. Not without him beside her. Not without seeing more of this strange new place. The time had come for them to finally take action and it left her with a mixture of anxious excitement - even though she knew very little about what the future held in store for the two of them. There wasn't much he'd been willing to tell her about his plans. She knew they would remove the Veil. What she didn't know was how.

But even that uncertainty couldn't halt her enthusiasm. They were going to give her people their birthright. She was going to fulfill the dream the Dalish had clung to for all these years and to have that achievement so close at hand left her feeling elated.

Isii nearly leapt to her feet when she heard the knock on the door, smiling broadly as Solas cautiously peered into the room. He'd changed out of his armor, donning a tailored robe of layered cloths. It was a surreal sight, in a way - countless ages had passed and yet now he looked as though he'd simply walked out of one of the memories of Elvhenan she'd witnessed in the Fade.

He said nothing, meeting her eyes only briefly before nodding over his shoulder, stepping out of the way as a small gathering of elves brought in a bathing tub. It wasn't the thin, curving metal she was used to using in Skyhold. This was larger, more circular in shape and made entirely of stone - an impossible load to carry for only a few sets of hands. She was certain they were using magic to aid their journey as they carried it to the center of the room, the few who followed wordlessly beginning to fill it with water and vials of perfumed oils. There was a certain somber tone to the whole affair. She'd watched her own servants perform this task countless times and yet there was an almost ritualistic quality to how these elves proceeded. As the last of the water was poured, two of them moved toward the pillars that flanked the bed, fingers twisting as they willed flames to take shape atop each. Their hands dipped into small sachets, dusting a sprinkling of dried herbs into the firelight and soon a pleasant, unfamiliar odor began to fill the room. Another went to the foot of the bed, laying out a white robe stitched with shimmering silver threads. All the while Solas stood by the entrance, watching her silently until the task was completed, each of his followers looking to him for instruction.

"Leave us," he ordered, only moving from his post to close the door behind them as they filed out of the room.

"They all seem rather serious," Isii murmured with a grin, testing the temperature of the water with her fingertips. She could feel the subtle hum of magic through the warmth, a soothing pulse that she could only assume emanated from the sigils carved deep into the basin's sides. "I take it you're joining me?"

She looked up when he didn't respond, his silence weighing heavily on features that he quickly schooled. "I intend to assist," he said quietly, stepping closer, "if you would permit me the honor."

"Shouldn't I be the one honored that the Dread Wolf is willing to play the servant and bathe me?" she teased, her fingers loosening the fastenings of her jacket. He watched her undress, carefully folding back his sleeves. "I can't imagine this is how you normally would welcome a guest," she continued, shimmying out of her breeches, "unless, of course, Elvhenan was far more intimate in their customs than I'd assumed."



“Normally, the task would be performed by attendants,” he explained. “I thought it best that I... do this myself.”

She arched a brow, smirking. “Is it just me, or do you seem a little nervous?”

He did not answer her, instead gesturing for her to step closer, delicately gathering her hair before securing it above her nape. He rested her palm against his own, guiding her into the tub, letting her settle into the warm embrace of the water before his hands moved along her body. Isii let her eyes close with a sigh, breathing deeply as he eased the tension from her muscles, the pressure of his touch mingling with the tingle of energy that stirred the mana within her. It was easily the best massage she’d ever received, relaxed not only by his hands but by the soothing scent that seemed to thicken the air, clouding her thoughts until she could focus on nothing else but the soft trickling of the water as he moved. She’d been anxious before, eager to explore the castle and proceed with their plans - but now all she wanted was to remain here, transfixed by such easy pleasure, her limbs growing heavy with contentment. He leaned forward from his position behind her, his hands dipping low onto her hips and she took the opportunity to nuzzle her face into the side of his neck. “That feels good, vhenan,” she purred happily, pressing a gentle kiss to his skin.

She felt the slightest pause, fingertips stilling against her and when she opened his eyes she found his had closed, his brow furrowed deeply. She lifted a hand from the water, tracing his cheek, trying to guide his lips to hers but he shied away, taking her hand in his own. “Stand up for me,” he whispered.

She obeyed, stepping out of the tub at his guidance, watching as he slickened his palms with a scented oil that reminded her of sugared almonds. His eyes did not meet hers as he spread it over her skin, palms gliding over her neck, her shoulders, her chest, lowering himself to his knees as he worked his way downward. It felt exquisite as she swayed on her feet, lightheaded and soothed, struggling to keep her eyes open and yet - something didn’t feel right. Solas looked sorrowful in a way she didn’t understand, the corner of his lips tight with tension as he carefully unfolded a towel, methodically drying her off where she stood. He was still on his knees when she touched his chin, easing his gaze to lift. When his eyes met her own she could see they were wet, glistening, the unshed tears startling her.

“Solas?” She knelt instinctively, cupping his jaw as his breath shuddered. “What is it?” His lips parted to speak, but he merely swallowed hard, shaking his head. She didn’t understand. Had something happened when he left the room? Had there been bad news that now troubled him? “Solas, talk to me...”

“I can’t-” He said with some effort, gripping her wrists, pulling her hands from his face. He stared at her, creases deepening across the bridge of his nose as his features tightened, straining. “I can’t do this,” he whispered. She couldn’t tell if the confession was for her sake or his own - it sounded as though he’d only just come to the realization.

Her head tilted as she peered at him. “Do what?”

“Ir abelas,” he said quickly, his throat clenching around the apology as he pushed himself to his feet, releasing his hold on her.

“Solas-”

With a gesture, he extinguished the flaming pillars. Isii jerked involuntarily, sucking in a breath. It was as if she’d suddenly been jolted awake, blinking as the haze that had left her so lightheaded evaporated. Fen’Harel did not pause, brushing past her as he rushed for the exit.

“Vhenan?” He said nothing, pushing past the heavy door, letting it fall closed behind him as she scrambled for her clothing.

“Solas, wait!” Isii cursed as she struggled to dress herself, her jacket only half-buttoned as she followed. She did not give the bewildered guards a chance to stop her, ignoring their protests as she took to the stairwell. “Fen’Harel, stop!” she shouted. She could not see him, but she knew he had to be close - this was the only path he could have taken. She could hear movement behind her and she quickened her steps, darting past confused faces as she retraced the walkway she’d been led down before. When she spotted him she broke out into a jog.

“Dammit, Solas, *venavis*.”

He turned to face her, eyes narrowed as he grasped her sharply by the arm. “Keep your voice down,” he hissed, letting go only to push through a nearby door, storming into an empty room.

“What?” she sneered, following quickly on his heels. “Am I embarrassing you, Dread Wolf?” She shoved the door shut, cutting off access to any curious onlookers, anger bubbling through her frustration. “What is wrong with you?” she asked, exasperated. She couldn’t understand his behavior - such outbursts seemed so out of character for him, especially when she had no clue as to what had provoked it. One second he looked like he was about to break down and cry, the next he’s fleeing from her? “There’s something you’re not telling me, Solas.”

“Leave it alone,” he growled, keeping his back to her as he braced himself against the table that centered the room. She could hear the thickness of his voice, the emotions he was trying to choke down -

“No,” she said firmly. His fists clenched, knuckles grinding hard into the wood. “You don’t get to shut me out. Not after everything we’ve been through. I’m not leaving until you give me an answer. What is it that you cannot do?”

“*Save you*,” he snapped, his voice lifting into a shout that froze her in place. He cast a glance over his shoulder before hanging his head, letting out an unsteady, ragged breath. “I cannot save you,” he whispered.

Isii stared at him, lips parted but uncertain what to say. “From what?”

“From me.”

An icy pit pooled in her stomach as she paused. “What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked. “Fen’Harel, you’d... You would never hurt me, Solas,” she said softly. “I know that.”

“Do you?” His head dropped lower, his shoulders tensing. “I doubt you would put that much trust in me if you knew what was coming,” he muttered darkly.

Isii watched him, uncertain what to think. “You’re scaring me, vhenan,” she whispered.

“Then perhaps you have good reason to be frightened.”

She took a few hesitant steps closer. “Tell me what this is about,” she urged gently.

“I... *can’t*.”

“Solas-”

"I would not have you carry the same burden I do."

"*I want to*," she stressed. "Ma ghilana, vhenan. I would not have followed you here if I did not want to share your burdens. What more do I have to do to prove that to you?" She reached out to him, running a hand along his back but he recoiled, pulling away from her. "Tell me," she pleaded. "Please, vhenan. Why did you run from me?"

"I..." He took a breath, still refusing to meet her eye. "I was going to lead you into the long sleep."

"What?"

"It is the only way I can guarantee your safety," he explained. "If you lay sleeping, your spirit bound to uthenera, then you would live through what's to come."

"What's coming, Solas?" she pressed. "What are you so afraid of?"

He turned to face her, his gaze a mixture of grief and shame before his eyes fell to the floor. "You have to understand," he began, his jaw clenching. "The Veil took everything from the elves. *I* took everything - their immortality, their connection to the Fade. Though we may look the same, your people are not my own. *My* people fell for what I did to strike the false gods down. I have to save them..." He took a breath, his next words coming out in a hushed murmur. "Even if it means this world must die."

The weight of that revelation struck hard, her eyes widening in horror. "*What?*"

"I will enter the Fade using the mark," he said, glancing down at his palm, flexing his fingers. "Then I will tear down the Veil. As this world burns in the chaos, I will restore the world of my time. Those who lie sleeping will wake and the world of the elves will be as it once was."

The flat directness of his voice laid in stark contrast to the dread that thickened her own. "You're going to destroy the world?"

"Not happily."

She gawked, lips parted, barely daring to draw breath. "You would never do that, Solas," she whispered.

"I thank you for that... for seeing in me a better man than I am," he said, his sincerity only deepening the solemn grief in his features. "But that does not change what I must do."

Her fingers went instinctively to the scar across her palm, tracing it with her thumb. "That's why you wanted the anchor. It wasn't to keep me safe... You tricked me."

"I did not lie when I said the mark would kill you. Taking the anchor for myself served a dual purpose. Saving you from a cruel fate while procuring the means to continue towards my own."

"And now you have everything you need, is that it? The orb. The anchor. And I gave them to you blindly." He nodded slowly. "You used me."

"You assisted me, as I in turn assisted you. I fully admit that you deserve far better, vhenan... like all the rest I have used in one hopeless battle after another."

"I'm no longer of use to you," she ground out between clenched teeth, pinpricks stinging her eyes. "I've fulfilled my purpose - so you want to get rid of me."

“No.” His denial came quickly, impassioned. “No, Isii. That is not... I want to *shelter* you from this. You are important to me - more important than anything-”

“You told me the Veil could be removed safely.”

Her hardened voice seemed to startle him for the briefest of moments. It was not the emotional plea he’d probably been expecting, considering the tears welling in her eyes - instead she hurled an accusatory reminder of his deception, laying all focus there. He recovered from her interruption, trying to slip back into the impersonal tone that now seemed to chafe him - his once-protective mask far less comfortable than it was before. “I told you that I would remove it in the safest way possible,” he said stiffly. “There is a difference.”

“Split hairs if you want,” she snapped. “You *knew* that I didn’t fully understand what the consequences were when I agreed to help you. You knew and you chose not to correct me.” She tried to swallow down the tightness in her throat, tension threatening to silence her voice. “I nearly *died* protecting your orb, Solas. All so you could give *my people* a second chance-”

“What would you have had me say?” he asked. “That in order to restore my world I must destroy your own?”

“I would have had you *trust me!*” she yelled. “I would have had you keep your fucking promises, Fen’Harel. You *promised* me there would be no more secrets. You *promised*-”

“And what would that have achieved, Inquisitor?” he fired back at her, sharp creases cutting into the bridge of his nose as he scowled. *Good*, she thought with some petty level of satisfaction. She wanted this - wanted to get under his skin. She’d rather have him shouting at her than hiding behind his composure, self-control masquerading as civility. “Could you tell me truthfully that you would have agreed to help me if I had fully confessed the nature of my plans to you that night on the Storm Coast? When you could barely look at me without hatred in your eyes? You have earned your anger,” he added firmly. “I do not blame you for it. But I doubt you would have behaved any differently in my place. I made a promise that I knew I could not keep - no matter how I felt, no matter what I may have wanted. And I am sorry for that. But I cannot forsake the fate of the world for your feelings, as much as it pains me to say it.”

“Whatever you hope to achieve, this world dying is not the answer.”

“Not a good answer, no,” he admitted. “Sometimes terrible choices are all that remain.”

“And what makes you think this plan will work any better than your others, Fen’Harel?” she asked. “Giving Corypheus your orb, creating the Veil in the first place-”

“That was different,” he defended. “Had I not created the Veil, the false gods would have destroyed the entire world.”

“Which is precisely what you intend to do now!”

“No. Not entirely. Some may yet survive. But I do not pretend that those spared will somehow make up for the great losses that must be endured in their stead.” He let out a defeated sigh. “I do not take this action lightly, Isii. I am not a monster. I take no joy in this. But the return of my people means the end of yours.” The gentle way in which he said it pained and sickened her in equal measure. She could see he meant it. He did not want this. It hurt him to do this. And yet he would, all the same.

How strange it was, to feel the urge to offer him comfort while simultaneously her hand itched to

slap him.

“You’d murder countless innocents?”

Solas tilted his head, his eyes narrowing. “Wouldn’t you, to save your own? If you were responsible for your people’s annihilation? If you had driven them nearly to extinction and you had even one shred of hope to save them, would you not do everything in your power to do so?” His eyes studied her own, fingers twitching as if he wanted to reach out and touch her, yet thought better of it. “You have shown me there is value in this world, vhenan,” he said softly. “More to treasure than I ever could have imagined. That does not make what comes next any easier.”

“So what?” she asked, her eyes watering. “Is that supposed to make things better, somehow, because you feel bad about it?”

“No,” he answered plainly. “It does not. There is nothing right or fair in this. There is little about this world or the one that came before that is right or fair. There are only hard truths and terrible choices that no one should ever have to make. And yet, to do nothing is not an option. Not when so much has been lost on my account.”

“You don’t need to destroy this world,” she declared, a tear escaping from the corner of her eye. “I’ll prove it to you.”

His gaze softened with pity as he trailed a thumb along the wet track on her cheek. There was a lightness to his touch, hovering over her skin, as if he was afraid to touch her. “I would treasure the chance to be wrong, Isii,” he whispered. “I would.”

“Then let me try,” she said, clasping his hand against her jaw before he would pull it away. “We can search for another way. Together.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” he said, withdrawing. She wouldn’t release her hold on his wrist, clutching his sleeve with her other hand.

“Let me help you, Solas.”

He shook his head. “I cannot do that to you, vhenan.”

“But you would do it to yourself? I am already here, Fen’Harel. I’ve already made that choice.”

“Then I can only beg for your forgiveness, for it was my mistake in allowing you to do so,” he said, shrugging out of her hold. “I should not have brought you into this any further than was necessary.”

“Solas-”

“There is only death on this journey, vhenan,” he stressed. “I brought you here to keep you from having to suffer that fate. I can offer you uthenera. I can give you peace-”

“And I refuse it, if you’re not there to share it with me,” she said quickly, cutting off his plea.

“I would not have you see what I become.”

“If you’re so ashamed of what you will become, then don’t become it. Change your path, Solas. There has to be another way.”

“There isn’t.”

“Can you be certain?” she pressed, closing the small distance between them. “Can you look me in

the eye and tell me with absolute certainty that there is no other alternative? You've spent, what - a year, crafting this plan? One year. That is *nothing* for an immortal like you. You have nothing but time on your side, Solas," she said, pressing her hand to his cheek. "So give me some. Give *us* some. Give the two of us time to look for another way. We can help your people without destroying mine. Let's find a solution that won't put more blood on your hands."

"And what if you're wrong?" he asked, his eyes narrowing. "What if no such answer exists?"

"Then at least we would have tried."

He gave her a hard look and she thought maybe - *maybe* - she'd gotten through to him, yet he pulled away, pacing across the room, sinking into a chair. His fingers rasped harshly over his brow. "What if your plan fails, Dread Wolf?" she continued. "What if you manage to destroy this world only to find you cannot rebuild what once was? What then? Will you stand on our ashes and lick your wounds alone? Is that what it's going to take for you to realize that you're making a mistake?" His eyes flicked over to meet hers - a fierce but silent defensiveness in his gaze before he settled it on the corner of the room. She crossed over to him, lowering herself to her knees in front of his seat, her hands resting on his thighs. "*I love you*, Solas," she stressed. "I believe in you. I wouldn't be here if I didn't. I know you don't want to do this."

"Isii--"

"I know that you think you don't have a choice, but you do." She took his hand, enveloping it between her own. "There is *always* a choice. The world may have gone to shit, but there is so much here to *save*, vhenan. So much beauty and goodness and resilience. The Veil may have destroyed the world you knew, but look at how much survived! Look at how much we've grown and thrived." She clutched his hand to her chest, tears threatening to fall once more. "If you love me as much as I *know* you love me, you wouldn't want to destroy the world that made me what I am."

"This isn't about ending your world," he said, shaking his head. "If I could save it, I would, but I *can't*. Not at the expense of my own people. And if I do nothing, then this world will merely die a slower death. A day will come when the Blight can no longer be resisted - where there will be nothing *left* to save."

"Then we'll find a way to fix it."

"There *is* no other way--"

"Mythal," she said quickly, "she spoke to me, after I retrieved the orb. She told me you would one day want me to stay your hand."

She watched him flinch with surprise, his eyes locking hard onto her face. "What?"

"She *knows*, Fen'Harel," she stressed, relieved to see that *that*, at least, had given him pause. "She knows you don't want to do this. She knows that you want me to convince you to stop."

"That's not..." His voice trailed away and she could see the wheels turning, his mind working over the revelation as his eyes cast themselves aside. "She was the one who told me how to save you," he said, his voice hushed.

Isii hadn't been expecting that. She'd hoped that perhaps the All-Mother had opposed this plan - that maybe that was the true reason why she'd sought her out in the Fade. But if she was opposed, then why suggest to him that he should force her into uthenera when she knew Isii would argue against it? Still - this fact seemed to trouble Solas, so she seized upon it, desperate to cling to any

thread that would unravel his resolve. “By doing what? Silencing me? Tucking me away in some tower so that I wouldn’t get in your way?” Isii asked. “Did she tell you to do that for your sake or for hers?”

His eyes did not meet her own, casting his troubled look into the corner of the room. “Look at me, *vhenan*,” she pleaded, reaching up to touch his face. “Ma sal’shiral,” she cooed, stroking his cheek. “You’ve told me time and again that I am more than you ever thought I could be. That I was the key to our salvation. That I made the whole world change,” she added, her eyes glistening. “Do you remember?”

She felt the slightest tremor beneath her palm. “I do,” he whispered.

“Then give me the chance to surprise you again,” she begged. “Please. Help me show you another path. A way we can save both our worlds.”

Solas’s lips parted, inhaling to speak and yet the breath caught in his throat, uncertainty wavering across his face as he stared down at her. “My followers-”

“-will follow you,” she finished for him. “If they are loyal, they will continue to serve as your allies. This entire plan depends upon your action, Dread Wolf. No one can force you to enter the Fade. No one can force you to tear down the Veil. The choice is yours and yours alone, to be made only when you deem it necessary. Would you not exhaust all other possibilities before taking such drastic action?”

“Mythal will object-”

“I don’t care about Mythal,” Isii insisted, pushing herself higher, leaning further into his lap as her hands cupped his jaw. “I care about *you*.” She coaxed him forward, forcing him to meet the press of her mouth. His lips barely moved through the kiss, only the slightest twitch. Even so, she tried again, then again, coaxing a pleading moan from him. She didn’t know what the sound asked of her. To stop? To *never* stop? Still she kissed him, pouring more of herself into each press, peppering words between each breath. “Please. My love. I know you, Dread Wolf.” She pulled back, looking into his eyes. “I know who you are. I know your heart.” Isii took his hand, clutching it tightly over her breast. “It’s the same one that beats in my chest - *ma vhenan*.” He started to lower his gaze, to shake his head but she caught his chin, forcing him to look her in the eye.

“I know you want to believe me.” It wasn’t a question. There was no doubt in her voice. No hesitation or wavering. “So *believe me*.”

She allowed the weight of her words to settle, saying nothing more as she waited, silently commanding a response. He attempted, managing a few false starts as his lips parted and then closed again, uncertain what to say, his eyes searching her face as if he’d find the answer there. Solas brushed a strand of hair from her brow, his gaze following as fingertips slowly drifted downward, his thumb resting at the hollow of her throat.

“Every instinct is telling me this won’t end well,” he whispered, his eyes solemnly locking onto her own, “for either of us.”

“I’m willing to take that risk,” she said, curling her hand along the back of his knuckles until her fingers wove between his own. “If you are.”

She’d never seen him look as lost as he did in that moment - so conflicted, so torn as he stared at her. She tightened her grip on his hand, swallowing. “Just say yes,” she pleaded softly. “That’s all I need to hear. Say yes, and we’ll face this together. No matter what comes.”

“No matter what...” he echoed, pausing before letting out a slow breath. The Dread Wolf closed his eyes, brow furrowed, his lips pulling into a thin line.

The word came with effort, but there it was -

A softly breathed *yes*.

## Chapter End Notes

ma ghilana - guide me/my guide

ma sal'shiral - my soul's journey



# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Maker’s sake, woman,” the man grumbled, watching as his wife carefully positioned her newest possession onto the wall of their tavern. The painting would not straighten, no matter how many times she fussed with it, slinging slightly to the right each time her hands left the humble wooden frame. “Don’t you think this is a bit much?”

“Hush,” she chided, angling her head with a frown as she nudged it, finally satisfied that it was as straight as it was ever going to sit.

“It doesn’t even look like her.”

“How would you know?” she asked, her hands settling on generously rounded hips. “It’s not as though you’ve ever seen the Herald.”

“I know ‘cause I’ve seen twenty different portraits like that being pawned off on the gullible in the market,” he said, waving a calloused hand dismissively at her prize. “She looks different in every single one. Sometimes fair, sometimes dark as night and every shade in between. Only thing they manage to agree on is the white hair and the shape of her ears.”

“That’s enough out of you,” she said, pulling the towel from her apron as she shuffled behind the well-worn bar.

“She doesn’t even look Dalish,” a gruff-looking patron added, shovelling another spoonful of stew into his mouth, chewing around his words. “Don’t got her tattoos.”

“Shows what you know,” the tavern woman said pointedly, wiping down a glass. “Sandren’s cousin’s wife went to Skyhold once to barter with the merchants there. She saw the Inquisitor firsthand - said Lavellan’s tattoos had been removed.” A wistful look warmed her features, her gaze drifting upward. “The Maker took them when she fully embraced the light of his glory, freeing her from the symbols of her heathen gods.”

Her husband merely groaned. Clearly, he wasn’t convinced.

“Do you really need to hang that in here, though?” he asked. “Next you’ll be building a damn shrine.”

“It’s important to pay our respects.”

“Andraste’s ass, Marta, the Herald isn’t dead,” he said. “The Inquisition ain’t exactly short on coin. If she was corpsed, they wouldn’t’ve passed up on the chance to hold some big, pompous funeral. We would have gotten word of it, even out here.”

“She’s not dead,” Marta agreed. “She’s at the Maker’s side. She emerged from the Fade when Thedas needed her most and she returned to it when her duty was done.”

“I told you not to listen to Sister Amalia’s rantings,” he muttered. “The woman may be holy, but she’s spouting nonsense.” He turned in his chair. “Right, Sister? Back me up on this.”

The woman he addressed shifted uncomfortably in her seat, her hands smoothing over her Chantry

robes. "It is... a controversial belief," she said delicately, picking up her fork, acting as though her food had suddenly become far more interesting than before. "Amalia claims she has had a vision. The Maker works in mysterious ways - I will leave it at that."

The patron who sat by the bar scoffed, washing his mouthful of food down with a gulp of ale. "What horseshit," he muttered. "Word is she just ran off with her elven lover. Two knife ears go froliccing off into the woods and you lot treat it like it's some sort of-"

He didn't manage to finish before a swift slap knocked him hard on the back of his head, sending him into a fit of yelping coughs. "You'll keep a civil tongue in your mouth if you intend to spend your coin here," Marta scolded, jabbing her finger into his face. "The Maker chose an elf as our savior and I won't have you blaspheming like that under my roof."

The man shot her a dirty look but calmly went back to his food, grumbling under his breath. The woman made her way around the bar, tottering over to a table in the corner. "Don't pay that brute any mind," she said, stacking emptied bowls from the two elves who sat there, keeping to themselves. "Anything else I can get for you?" she added sweetly. "More ale?"

"No, thank you," the man answered politely, shooting a glance to his companion. The raven haired woman's lips were subtly curled with amusement, as if Marta had just interrupted some private joke.

"Haven't seen you two in these parts before," the tavern woman continued cheerfully, making small talk. "You just in for the festival or are you looking for coin? I know a farmer who could still use a few migrant workers for the harvest. He pays well. Better than most round these parts."

The man shook his head. "We're merely passing through," the elf answered calmly, fishing his coin purse from a pocket of his vest. "I think it's best we continue on our way," he said to his partner, his brows lifting. "Don't you?"

The woman nodded without a word as he sorted out his payment for the meal. "Sure you don't want a room for the night?" Marta asked. "With the festival in full swing, finding a spot to bed down might be a tall order. I've got space, if you're interested. It's small, but if you're fine with squeezing in tight for the evening-"

"We appreciate the hospitality, but we have accommodations elsewhere," the elven man answered, offering her a handful of coins. Marta sifted them in her palm. They hadn't been shy with their tip. That brought a smile to her face as the pair rose to leave.

The streets of Ansburg were bustling that night, the Minanter River glittering as it caught the lamplight, its cobblestone banks lined with various tents and tables overflowing with goods from across Thedas. Richly scented Antivan coffee. Delicately woven Kirkwall textiles. Wine sellers from Wycome, displaying vintages both local and imported. Musicians played for tossed coins as the din of voices rang through the night, people enjoying the thrill of a good barter, trading compliments and feigning insult in the hopes of striking the best deals.

The elven pair slipped into the crowd unnoticed, the woman casually looping her arm with her male companion's. "Apparently I have ascended to the Maker's side," she hummed thoughtfully, keeping her voice low as she shot an amused glance to her partner. "Strange. You'd think I would have noticed."

"People are always inclined to invent their own stories when a person of great importance reaches the status of a legend."

“Not that you’d know anything about that, Dread Wolf.”

Solas allowed himself a small, private smile.

They made their way through the bustling throng, careful to step around the shifting mass of bodies, humans and elves and dwarves more focused on the displays of goods rather than the people around them. A large man rammed hard into Solas’s shoulder as he pushed past, his eyes narrowing into a glare as he spat at him to watch where he was going. Solas mumbled an unfelt apology as they kept moving, his hand carefully dipping into his pocket. His coin purse was still where he’d left it. One could never be too careful - such conditions were perfect for pickpockets.

He felt Isii stiffen at his side, her fingers tightening on his arm as she sucked in a breath. He followed the hard line of her gaze forward, scanning the crowd for the source of her distress. “How many this time?” he asked calmly.

“Two,” she murmured low. “Straight ahead. Coming this way.”

He spotted the agents, the teal of their hoods peaking out through the crowd as they approached. Isii began to turn, but the Dread Wolf continued to guide her forward, keeping his voice steady as he tucked his head close to her ear. “The best way to hide is simply to appear as if you are a person not worth noticing,” he instructed. “Stay calm. Don’t make eye contact. They will not recognize you.”

In truth, there was a chance that he was wrong. Their methods of disguising themselves had been rather superficial. Isii’s cream colored hair was stained an inky black, her body clothed in a humble peasant’s dress, worn and patched, the hem frayed and muddied from their travels. She wore no shoes, her ankles and feet merely wrapped in cloth, fingerless gloves covering the noticeable scar on her palm. His appearance had only changed a little - the weeks had left a thick stubble on his scalp, short dark hairs that itched after so many months of shaving, but they served their purpose well.

Isii nodded, nervously fidgeting with the glove of her left hand until the Dread Wolf wove his fingers with hers, giving them a reassuring squeeze. As the Inquisition agents drew closer, Isii feigned an intense interest in one of the stalls, pulling him with her as she moved to inspect an array of dwarven pottery, trying to appear casual as she glanced over her shoulder to watch the soldiers.

They passed by without incident.

“They should have just listened to me when I sent word,” Isii grumbled once it was safe to continue on their way.

“We both knew the manner in which you disappeared would raise suspicions,” Solas said. She’d sent a formal announcement to her advisors that she was stepping down from her position as Inquisitor, reassuring them that she was safe despite her desire not to be found. But even as Solas arranged for the letter to be delivered discreetly, they both knew it would not stop their efforts to find her.

“If I had to guess, I’d say chances are Cullen doesn’t trust the contents of the letter,” she said with a sigh. “Short of me saying to his face that I left willingly, he probably assumes I’ve been kidnapped. Most likely by you. Not that I can blame him.”

“My apologies for the way I handled things,” he said. “I know I robbed you of the ability to exchange proper goodbyes with any of them.”

"I've made peace with that," Isii said with a nod. "What we're doing now is more important. I would rather focus my energy on saving them rather than get tied down trying to explain something they wouldn't understand. I can worry about mending bridges when this is over."

He lifted her hand to his lips, pressing a kiss to it as they walked. "You can be assured we aren't likely to run into any Inquisition forces once we've crossed the border."

"True," she said with a bitter laugh, "but the idea of being two elves wandering Tevinter isn't exactly a thought that puts my mind at ease."

"Hopefully the risks will be worth it," he added, pausing as they wove through a particularly tight gathering. "If there are answers to be found, they would lie in the heart of what once was Elvhenan." The fact that they were forced to travel by foot did not put him at ease. He would much rather use the eluvians - but currently, the potential danger of doing so outweighed the benefits. The Tevinters had a longstanding fascination with the ancient mirrors, which was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it meant that many of those that lied within the boundaries of the Imperium had been well preserved and could still be activated. On the other, a great number of them had been moved, kept as the prized possessions of Magisters and scholars hoping to unlock their secrets. There was no telling where they might emerge should they use the lands in-between to travel there. He would not risk exposing her until his followers had gathered better intel.

There was only one mirror that he knew would allow them safe passage - the one in his old home in the overgrown Forest of Arlathan. But the hope of finding anything useful there without quite a lot of excavation was slim. The humans had done their job well when they buried the final remnants of the empire's shining gem.

"Need I remind you that there is a certain Altus we can call in favors with?" she gently nudged. "You know he would agree to help us move about safely in any way that he can. I doubt he'd ask too many questions if I assure him it's important."

"I've considered the possibility," he said smoothly. "Though I am hesitant to involve Dorian unless absolutely necessary. He has his own matters to concern himself with. And there is always the chance he would inform the Inquisition that we had made contact." Solas squeezed her hand, briefly touching his brow to her temple. "You have every reason to be apprehensive, vhenan. But I will not let you come to harm."

"I know," she said confidently, smiling up at him. He could see her faith in him was unwavering in that respect.

A chill breeze swept down the riverside, causing him to bundle deeper into his fur-lined vest, his free hand slipping into his pocket for warmth. Solas stopped suddenly, halting in the road as his fingers met something unfamiliar nestled alongside his coin purse. Isii frowned at him.

"What is it?"

He drew the items from his pocket, frowning as he stared down at his palm.

There lay two chess pieces, custom carved and painted in opposing colors.

A dragon and a wolf.

Fen'Harel closed his hand into a quick fist, his eyes darting sharply among the crowded streets, searching faces for anyone who looked out of place, any sign that they were being watched. There was no telling when someone had slipped him this message, other than the fact that it had

happened sometime in the past few minutes.

“Vhenan?”

“We need to leave,” he said firmly, not taking his eyes away from his search. “Now.” He pressed his hand to the small of her back, urging her to move quickly as he took to a pace faster than before. “Forget the inn,” he said, barely above a whisper. “We will book passage on a river barge tonight. Head east to Wycome instead. Pursue a more surreptitious route.”

Isii agreed without argument, though she was clearly unnerved by his tone as they disappeared into the night along the banks of the Minanter.

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The ground was overgrown, wild, woven with vines that choked the life from the weeds that struggled to reach for enough daylight to thrive. They did not dare creep too close to the small cottage though - a ring of high grasses suddenly stopping as if held back by some unseen barrier. Little grew in the barren soil beyond besides the gnarled and gruesome trees whose roots remained fixed around the structure. Upon close inspection, one might catch a glimpse of pale, sun-aged bones buried deep into their twisted trunks. The locals whispered that in decades past, it was not uncommon to hear the groaning of men who had dared too close, left to die a slow death as the bark consumed them. Even though all had remained quiet since the Fifth Blight, the Chasind continued to keep their distance.

Not even the promise of uncovering hidden trinkets the witch had left behind could overcome their fear of what might happen to those who trespassed.

A low mist clung to the damp air of the swamp, water lazily churning beneath the chorus of staccato insect chirps and the trilling of small birds.

Their song fell silent once she appeared.

Slow footsteps shushed quietly through the grasses, creaking over old wooden stairs as a hand pressed the groaning door of the cottage open. The scent of dust filled the old woman’s nose as a fire took shape, light flickering shadows over the small room that had seen no movement since the day that Warden had rummaged about, greedy hands seeking out the book her daughter had so greatly desired. Flemeth held no grudge against the Cousland girl, the child that now called herself a Queen. Killing the fragment of herself that she’d left behind, stealing the grimoire - she’d merely fulfilled her role in this game, precisely as the goddess had designed it. She could not have asked for a more obedient pawn.

Rarely did anyone dare step outside of the roles she assigned them.

The witch settled herself into her dusty chair by the fire, armored fingers folding together, clawed tips tapping as her lips drew into a thin line.

The pieces may have fallen out of place, but the future was inevitable. She could see the way those threads would bind, all paths weaving together, leading to the same conclusion. Perhaps he truly thought he could break free of that fate, to change a course he’d set for himself thousands of years ago. Prideful. Foolish. All his efforts would come to nothing. She was certain of it. This was nothing more than a minor obstacle.

And obstacles were either overcome.

Or eliminated.

A new age would come.

She would have her revenge.

Mythal was no stranger to playing the long game. Little shifts. Small manipulations. Resetting the board until the game was played according to her design. She had done so before. She would do so again.

*So long as the music plays-*

*We dance.*

## Chapter End Notes

Holy crap, it's over. o\_\_o

Thank you so much for everyone who's stuck with me through this. Thank you for all of your comments, your encouragement... your enthusiasm has given me so much joy. This story wouldn't exist if I hadn't gotten such an overwhelming response from you guys, asking me to expand it into a long fic. So thank you. For everything.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!